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Sacrifice and the "Other": Oppression, Torture and Death in *Alias Grace*, *Green Grass, Running Water*, and *News from a Foreign Country Came*

by

Kristine Smith

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Sacrifice and the "Other": Oppression, Torture and Death in *Alias Grace*, *Green Grass, Running Water*, and *News from a Foreign Country Came* submitted by Kristine Leeann Smith in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Julia Kristeva's theories on sacrifice and the "other" illuminate Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, and Alberto Manguel's *News from a Foreign Country Came*. Kristeva tells us that we often demonize others, projecting our negative qualities onto those we believe are different in the hope of eliminating these traits from our own psyches. The social contract which structures western society promotes the sacrifice--either physically, or through oppression--of this "other." To eliminate the sacrificial social contract, Kristeva theorizes, we must learn to accept the other, the strange, the foreign within our unconscious. If we can do this, we should be able to accept the other/stranger/foreigner instead of oppressing or destroying them. Kristeva believes that literature has the potential to guide us towards this reformed society, and each of these novels contributes to this process by helping the reader understand and embrace the "other."

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Introduction: Creating the Sacrificial Other

> In societies that practice sacrifice there is no critical situation to which the rites are not applicable, but there are certain crises that seem to be particularly amenable to sacrificial mediation. In these crises the social fabric of the community is threatened; dissension and discord are rife. . . .
>
> It is significant that sacrifice has languished in societies with a firmly established judicial system--ancient Greece and Rome, for example. In such societies the essential purpose of sacrifice has disappeared. It may still be practiced for a while, but in diminished and debilitated form.
>
> --René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*

Throughout history, René Girard contends, mankind has maintained peace through sacrificial practices. The creation of the modern judicial system, he theorizes, offered western society a means of controlling violence without resorting to blood sacrifice, and eventually eliminated the practice altogether (18). Despite the strong Girardian influence on her work, however, Julia Kristeva maintains that while ritual sacrifice may have disappeared from western society, we still rely heavily on subtler forms of sacrificial violence such as oppression, that our "social contract," in fact, "is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences" ("Women's Time" 23). In our patriarchal/colonial culture, the "other"--most often in the form of women, homosexuals, and racial minorities--is sacrificed to advance or protect the interests of white males.

Kristeva takes a psychoanalytic approach, delving deeply into the "semiotic," the "symbolic," and the "thetic" transition between the two. Governed by drive (Weir 159), the semiotic is the realm of the Mother, the world of the body. It precedes the boundary setting stage which allows the child to distinguish itself from the Mother and identify itself as an individual. The symbolic is the realm of the Father, the world of language, of

signs and boundaries. Modern western civilization is ruled by the Law of the Father. To enter the Symbolic, the child passes through the thetic phase[1] where s/he must violently reject the Mother, destroying Her in order to protect her/his hard-earned identity from the possibility of re-engulfment in the Mother's boundary-free world. Because humans gain admittance to the orderly world of the Father by killing the Mother, when the borders structuring society begin to collapse, the community instinctively attempts to reestablish its boundaries by replicating the transition from the semiotic to the symbolic (Reineke 152). The return to the semiotic is accomplished by entering the body--by probing into it either physically (ie. through torture) or figuratively (ie. through psychiatry, through media which dismember/distort/re-present the other). Persecutors "follow the trail of death across the bar of language to that place where transcendent powers of creation and destruction [can] be summoned" (Reineke 158), recreating in the bodies of their sacrificial victims the murder of the Mother in order to reestablish the Law of the Father and restore order to society.

The sacrificial victim, who is usually identified as "other," possesses qualities which threaten society, but also has the power, through death, to restore harmony to the community (Reineke 151). To explain our need for an "other," and to describe the process by which it is created, Kristeva draws on Freud's use of the uncanny: "Freud noted that the archaic, narcissistic self . . . projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making it an alien *double*, uncanny and demoniacal. . . . the strange appears as a defense put up by a distraught self: it protects itself by . . . [creating] the image of a malevolent double into which it expels the share of destruction it cannot contain" (*Strangers* 183-84, italics in text). Kristeva goes on to say that "the builder of the *other* and, in the final analysis, of the *strange* is . . . repression itself" (*Strangers* 184; emphasis in text). The "other" gives us identity by allowing us to define ourselves against him--ie. he is evil; I am different than he is; therefore I am good. The

individual has much invested in this "identification-projection" since it "lies at the foundation of . . . reaching autonomy" (Kristeva, *Strangers* 187).

Like Dr. Frankenstein, we are deeply disturbed by encounters with the "other" which we have created:

> The other leaves us separate, incoherent . . . he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our own feelings, that we reject them, or on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them--we feel stupid . . . .
>
> Also strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me--I do not even perceive him, perhaps he crushes me because I negate him. Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container . . . . (*Strangers* 187)

By assigning the qualities we fear or despise to the "other," we repress their existence within ourselves; then, hoping to permanently rid ourselves of the negative, "we flee from or struggle against the foreigner . . . fighting our unconscious--that 'improper' facet of our impossible 'own and proper'" (*Strangers* 191). We lash out violently against the "other," perhaps even murdering him. Because this negativity resides within our own hearts, however, it does not disappear with the death of the "other," but must be continuously expelled and destroyed, creating an endless string of sacrificial victims to bear our wickedness.

Violence against the "other" often takes the form of silencing. We cannot allow him to speak because we cannot risk learning that he is not the creature we have decided him to be: if this were to happen, the evils we have ascribed to him would return to us, their rightful owners. Because of this, in the past the "other" was rarely permitted free expression of its views and opinions: simply by gathering, "others" risked a violent confrontation with society; they had little or no representation in politics, in law, or in any

form of media since these institutions were dominated by white, middle and upper-class males. Now, at the end of the twentieth century this may finally be changing. Many recent works of Canadian fiction, for example, are told from the perspective of the "other," allowing us to see our world through different eyes and forcing us to reexamine our beliefs about and treatment of the "other." Novels such as *Alias Grace*, *Green Grass, Running Water*, and *News from a Foreign Country Came* affirm Kristeva's position that the "other" is often sacrificed to a society that cannot accept it; indeed, these stories emphasize the sacrificial nature of societies whose very structure depends upon the oppression of the "other."

In *Alias Grace*, Margaret Atwood brings Grace Marks, a "murderess" from Canada's past, back to life in fiction, giving voice to a woman violently silenced by incarceration in 1843. Atwood tells the story not as it was told by chroniclers of the time, but from the perspective of Grace herself, revealing the world as it may have appeared to her. In a society run by upper-class white males, usually of British descent, Grace, an Irish servant girl oppressed on the basis of class, gender, and race, is clearly "other." When she is implicated in the murders of her boss and his housekeeper, Grace is punished by a society which demands that women and the lower-class submissively accept their place and never strike out against their "betters." The community reacts to the threat posed by Grace's class and gender transgressions by demonizing her: instead of questioning societal problems which could have driven Grace to participate in the murders, they brand her as criminal and insane, ensuring that she will be seen as completely "other." "Othering" Grace protects society by preventing those in a position similar to hers from relating to her, and perhaps acting out their frustrations as she has. Grace is imprisoned not only as punishment for her alleged crime, but also as a warning to others on the margin that they must stay there, that any attempt to share the power enjoyed by the oppressor will be violently quashed. Atwood recuperates Grace by

showing her not as an insane demon, but as a woman rebelling against unjust constraints with which society has saddled her.

In Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* the voice we hear, one which has been silenced for many years, is that of the Native. This novel explores the Native's struggle to retain a distinctive identity while adapting to the inescapable influence of the white world. This is difficult because of white resistance to seeing the Native as he is, instead of in the stereotypical role of the "savage" which the white has assigned him. In the Savage Redman, the white has created a space for his own "savage" self to run free; by projecting his most vicious qualities onto the Native and then persecuting him, the white no longer needs to acknowledge those qualities within himself. The white man has long had a large investment in the figure of the Savage Redman,[2] and would eliminate the actual Native all together (either through genocidal acts, or figuratively, by erasing his presence from art,[3] literature, and history) rather than give up his stereotypes and accept the Native as he really is.

Alberto Manguel's *News from a Foreign Country Came* exposes the ritualistic torture and execution employed by the Argentine government to silence dissenting voices. The victims, political "others" whose only crime lies in opposing the ruling regime, are sacrificed to preserve the existing power structure. In a chilling scene, Berence, a master torturer, teaches his subordinates to see the victim as "other," erasing any sympathy the torturer might feel for his victim by denying their shared humanity, and allowing him to remain guilt-free as he inflicts pain and kills.

Violence does not flow in only one direction, however, and these novels demonstrate that the "other," frustrated by a society blind to its needs, will lash out violently against the oppressor. In *Alias Grace* for example, McDermott murders his boss and the housekeeper in part because he resents being treated as a lackey, a position from which society affords him no legitimate means of promotion. Mary, in possession of

Grace's body, is similarly motivated, and is further driven by the desire for revenge against an upper-class male like the one who got her pregnant and went unpunished for their transgression, whereas she, forced to have an illegal abortion, lost her life. King includes incidents involving Wounded Knee in *Green Grass*, reminding readers that Natives have resorted to violence when hopelessly frustrated by a system which completely ignores their needs. The terrorists in *News* track Berence down in Quebec and blow up his home, killing his wife, because they know he will never be prosecuted for the legally sanctioned atrocities he committed against their people.

Manguel's novel exposes the law as modern society's most effective tool for carrying out sacrifice. In analyzing the witch as sacrificial scapegoat, for example, Martha J. Reineke argues convincingly that changes to the law were an "essential precondition" for the witch hunt and made possible the widespread persecution of women viewed as a threat to society (132).[4] Similarly, laws today are often created to protect the interests of those in power and at the expense of the "other." The legal system's inability to provide justice for the "other" stems largely from its patriarchal/colonial roots which align it with the powerful in society, with the older, white males who dominate the institutions which create and enforce the laws.

The voice of the "other," now that it is finally being heard, is telling this new story in which the law, instead of providing justice for all, serves as a powerful tool of oppression. In *Alias Grace*, for example, Grace's crime lies not simply in the murders, but also in her status as a low-class Irish serving woman. Her lawyer explains that her case is so impossibly confused with the "Irish question," so tainted by society's fear of another Rebellion, that it is impossible for her to receive a fair trial (446). As soon as she is accused of helping murder Kinnear, Grace must be punished in order to prevent the rampant violence which would erupt if more members of the lower-class followed her example and turned upon their "superiors." (In light of this, it is significant that no trial is

held for Nancy's murder, which, unlike Kinnear's, does not threaten the existing class structure.) Native oppression in *Green Grass* is symbolized by the dam which the government approves for construction on tribal land despite the Band's opposition. When Eli Stands Alone goes to court to prevent the dam's operation, he finds little justice, discovering instead that the law is complicit in the government's oppression: although the courts temporarily prevent the use of the dam, they will not force the government to honour its treaty with the Natives by ruling against it.

A more extreme example of the justice system as a tool of oppression is found in *News from a Foreign Country Came*--here, the law not only deprives people of their rights, but of their lives. Acting within the law, the Argentine government is responsible for the deaths and disappearances of tens of thousands of civilians who oppose it. As in *Alias Grace*, the context of the novel is factual: approximately thirty thousand political prisoners "were killed or disappeared without a trace during the military's violent crackdown on leftists" ("Military Man"). Although this violence is sanctioned by law, there is nothing just about it: the traitors' only crime is expressing their disapproval of the government, or associating with someone who has: enemies of the state do not receive trials; they simply disappear. The authorities deny any knowledge of or responsibility for this, and kill many innocent people in their purges. Only the government's power to legitimize its activities through law--law which it creates--distinguishes it from a terrorist organization: its actions are no less horrifying.

Perhaps the law serves as such an effective tool of oppression because it delivers its sacrificial verdicts cloaked in the transcendental virtues of justice, truth, wisdom, and objectivity. As long as people believe the law lives up to these ideals, the system functions effectively; however, when they discover that it does not, that it shares the agenda of society's powerful, they lose faith in the system and it breaks down. The "other," as victim of the sacrificial social contract who most often suffers the law's

injustices, is especially likely to recognize and rebel against its oppressive actions: angered by the lack of justice available to them through the legal system, the "other" may act outside its rules, perhaps violently, and so the violence committed by the judicial system on the "other" can return to terrorize society. This violence may take the form of retribution against individuals who create and enforce the law, or perhaps of terrorist activity directed against society at large.

Failures of the judicial system create crises in *Green Grass* and *News*, where those outside the circle of power are driven to rebellion by legal systems which promote political agendas instead of providing justice. In *Green Grass*, Eli rebels through legal channels, turning the table on his oppressors: even though he does not expect a ruling in his favor, Eli challenges Duplessis and the government in court, tying them up for years and preventing operation of the dam. The "terrorists" in *News* take the law into their own hands, resorting to murder in order to exact revenge from a man who, despite the horror and injustice of his actions, will never be punished by the law because he was acting in its name.

When no other escape from the sacrificial social contract can be found, the "other" may resort to self-sacrifice or the sacrifice of one of its own as a means of combating the system. Such is the case in *Green Grass* where Eli, who refuses to allow his people to be sacrificed to the white man's dam, loses his life in the fight against it. When they collapse the dam, the old Indians and Coyote allow Eli to drown, sacrificing his life for the good of the community. The dam is an important symbol of white oppression, and by destroying it and three cars--a Nissan, a Pinto, and a Carmen Ghia--which represent Columbus's ships (Donaldson 39-40), the Indian gods symbolically erase the white presence, providing the Natives with an opportunity to reestablish their identity from a more empowered position. In *News* Marianne sacrifices herself, first by becoming abject and finally by voluntarily dying at the terrorists' hands. By doing so, she allows her

daughter to escape the violent world of the Captain, ensuring that Ana will not also pay for his sins with her life. These sacrifices result largely because of the legal system's failure to meet the needs of the "other": if the courts had ruled against the dam, the gods would not have had to destroy it and Eli would have lived; similarly, if the terrorists had been able to pursue Berence through legal channels, they may not have blown up his house and killed Marianne.

The turn to blood sacrifice when the law fails is hardly surprising when one considers René Girard's theory that the judicial system replaced the sacrificial system in western society (298), and that both serve the same purpose, acting as a braking mechanism for violence. Because of the highly contagious nature of violence, if either sacrifice or the law did not interrupt the process, a single violent act could begin a cycle of revenge which might very well culminate in the complete destruction of a society (Girard 14-15). Both sacrifice and the judicial system break this cycle by eliminating the quest for vengeance. The legal system does so by adopting vengeance as a cause of its own, forbidding everyone but the law from seeking retribution. The "holy, legal, and legitimate" violence sanctified by law eliminates the need for and acceptability of the "unjust, illegal, and illegitimate" violence of private vengeance (Girard 23). The law acts on behalf of the injured party, eliminating her/his need for revenge and preventing the commission of any act which will demand further retaliation. "[T]he final word on vengeance," Girard explains, belongs to the judiciary (15).

Sacrifice, on the other hand, breaks the cycle of violence by channeling all of the community's violent energy into a single controlled act of violence, taking one life in order to prevent an endless string of murders. The community blames its problems on a chosen victim, the scapegoat, and individuals vent all of their hostilities on him/her in a process of "*violent unanimity*" which reunites the society (Girard 81). Violence that would have otherwise been used for vengeance is spent on sacrifice instead, allowing the

return to a state of peace. This sacrificial process is still evident in our dealings with the other, Kristeva tells us ("Women's Time" 23), even when it does not result in bloodshed.

It may seem questionable whether the deaths of Eli and Marianne are truly "sacrificial" since they are not ritual executions. To be palatable to a twentieth-century western audience, however, sacrifice must be a very different act from the ritualistic slaying practiced by pre-law societies, and so in a contemporary novel, sacrifice may take the form of an accident, or perhaps even a murder (provided that those who benefit from the victim's death are in no way responsible for it). Eli's death takes on sacrificial significance since it seems as if the gods take his life in exchange for granting his community a fresh beginning. The ritualistic reaction by Eli's relatives to his death--they join together, rebuilding the family cabin on the very spot where he died (422)--adds to its sacrificial connotations. Marianne, on the other hand, turns her death into a sacrifice by offering herself up as a scapegoat, choosing to atone for her husband's sins, and for her sin of loving him, by giving up her life, even though she is innocent of any wrong-doing.

Eli, Marianne, and Grace are Girard's ideal sacrificial victims, the marginal, Kristeva's other/stranger/foreigner who we fear and destroy. Although Girard doubts the prevalence of women as sacrificial victims (12), Kristeva maintains that the matricidal tendencies of our patriarchal society make woman the ideal sacrifice (Reineke 84). Marginality is an important quality since it gives the victim little power to fight the system threatening her/his existence, and ensures that there will be no violent retribution for her/his suffering or death (Girard 12). These characters conform to Girard's theory that the sacrificial victim be part of, yet isolated from, the community (270): Grace through imprisonment, Eli because he lives away from the Band, and Marianne because she shuts herself off from everyone both physically and psychologically.

Each of these victims either refuses to or is incapable of communicating.[5] Grace evades Dr. Jordan's questions, knowing the answers he would like to hear but refusing to give them. Likewise, Eli is deliberately obtuse in his conversations with Sifton, changing the topic and refusing to answer his questions concerning the dam. By not granting the responses which their oppressors expect, these characters refuse to participate in their own oppression. Horrified by her husband's acts and unable to do anything about them, Marianne shuts herself off from the world, communicating only occasionally with her housekeeper. These problems with communication reflect the futility of speech when no one in power will listen to or understand your story--having been silenced for so long, the other is not interested in trying to communicate with a world that does not hear. The refusal to speak is a strategy of resistance since speech would place those who are silent inside "the discourse of a system of rules they are by their silence . . . breaking," the discourse belonging to "the patriarchal male world" (Hallgren 212).

Although sacrifice can temporarily rid society of a threatening presence, it does not eliminate it altogether. When Grace goes free at the end of *Alias Grace*, for example, she retains her subversive potential, remaining a threat to the oppressive patriarchal society which believes it has reformed her. Berence, in *News*, is the antithesis of Grace: although Ana has been rescued from the violence surrounding him by her mother's death, he still roams the earth, a knight protecting his cherished patriarchal values and so still a threat to those who oppose the ruling powers. In *Green Grass*, Eli's sacrifice removes the immediate threat posed by the dam, but the Natives still have to contend with a white world which is not going to disappear, and which will likely continue to try to destroy them.

Blood sacrifice may circumvent the sacrificial social contract, but does not destroy it. Kristeva offers us a more effective--and far more palatable method--for breaking this contract: we can, she hopes, end the violence against and oppression of the

"other" by learning to embrace the other within ourselves. If we can accept within ourselves even those qualities which we find abhorrent, we will no longer need to demonize the "other" by projecting these qualities onto them, and so should be able to accept them as they really are. When I embrace the "other," Kristeva says, "[t]he foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners" (*Strangers* 192). Atwood and King have written their novels from the perspective of the "other," a style which causes the reader to abandon her/his position at the centre and experience the world of the margins. As Kristeva explains, when "I incorporate . . . the speech of the other . . . I bind myself to him in a primary fusion, communion, unification. An identification. . . . In being able to receive the other's words . . . I become like him . . . . Through psychic osmosis/identification. Through love" (quoted in Weir165-66). This is a non-violent return to the maternal realm, an embrace of the stranger within oneself as the mother embraces the unborn child in her womb, a separate yet not-separate entity, collapsing the boundaries between self and other insisted upon by the Law of the Father.

Accepting the strange within myself does not mean that I become the strange, but rather that I acknowledge it as part of myself and under my control. Accepting my own savageness, for example, does not make me savage, but gives me sole responsibility for controlling my own savageness instead of attempting to control it by projecting it onto another and then sacrificing him, creating victim after victim as my savageness resurfaces. For Kristeva, the possibility of learning how to approach the other lies in the teachings of Freud, who "does not speak of foreigners," but instead "teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside of us" (*Strangers* 191). Psychoanalysis provides a means of accepting that

> . . . the other is in me. It is my unconscious. And instead of searching for a scapegoat in the foreigner, I must try to tame the demons that are in me.

> . . . [R]ecognizing . . . my death drives, my eroticism, my bizarrenesses, my particularity, my femininity, all these uncoded marginalities . . . I would tend less to constitute enemies from those phenomena, which I now project to the exterior, making scapegoats of others. (Kristeva, "Cultural Strangeness" 41)

"[U]ncanny strangeness," she explains, "sets the difference within us in its most bewildering shape and presents it as the ultimate condition of our being *with* others" (*Strangers* 192; italics in original). By acknowledging the savage within me, I dispense with the need for sacrificial victims to represent my own savageness, and so can live in peace with the other.

Psychoanalysis has the potential to reform institutions such as the judicial system, Kristeva believes, because the "ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics: it would involve a cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious--desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible" (*Strangers* 192). Kristeva is not the only theorist to see the possibility for transformation through the acceptance of the "other:" Emmanuel Levinas, for example, believes that "'justice can be established only if I . . . can become an other *like* others'" (qtd. in Keenan 266; emphasis Keenan's). Analyzing Levinas, Thomas Keenan concludes, "Because we all are, or can be(come), others for the others, we have something in common--this is the transcendental condition of possibility for what is called justice" (266). The ability to find the "other" within oneself could transform our legal system from a sacrificial institution to one which provides justice for all since, by accepting the "other" and recognizing society's agenda against it, the legal system could end its role in the sacrificial process by rendering judgments which are truly fair.

Literature has the potential to reform the social contract, to guide us towards a different and improved society "because, faced with social norms, literature reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed, nocturnal, secret, and unconscious universe" (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 31). Writing by women, Kristeva believes,

> bears witness to women's desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders, to nourish our societies with a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex. ("Women's Time" 32)

This is equally true of the writing by racial minorities which has only recently gained acceptance in our society. Fiction helps us in the process of embracing the "other" by allowing us to experience the world as the s/he does, by showing us that the qualities we share as human beings are of greater magnitude than the differences which separate us. Reading *Alias Grace* helps us to accept the "other" by allowing us to see Grace's experience from her position on the margins rather than from the perspective of those who occupy the centre of society, as it was reported at the time. Similarly, since it is told mainly from a Native point of view, *Green Grass* encourages the reader to identify with the Native, to see the Native as a fellow human rather than an "other," and to discard the image of the exotic Indian. Recognizing the Savage Redman as a product of her/his own imagination may cause the white reader to analyze her/his need for such a construct, and to accept those qualities within her/himself which s/he has been projecting onto the Native, eliminating her/his need to sacrifice this "other." In *News*, Manguel compels us to identify with the "other" by showing us the evil at the centre. By revealing the horrifying atrocities the government commits against those outside the circle of power, he reinforces

the need for society to respond to Kristeva's plea and do away with sacrifice by accepting the "other." Ideally, exploring such works will help the reader engage in the process of embracing an "other" which should no longer seem so "other" after all.

When I began this paper, I could find no critical articles on either *News from a Foreign Country Came* or *Alias Grace*, and only a handful on *Green Grass, Running Water*. I found articles by Dee Horne and Laura Donaldson particularly helpful for exploring King's subversion of settler culture, and thought that a sacrificial reading of the novel would be a useful addition to the ideas they put forward. Examining all three novels in the context of Kristeva's theories helps us understand that society seems compelled to create an "other," frequently demonizing those who are not white males and who do not conform to patriarchal ideals, in the attempt to rid itself of its negative and destructive qualities. Kristeva explains that the sacrificial structure of our society leads to the destruction or oppression of this "other." Most importantly, Kristeva offers us a way to change our existing social contract, insisting that we must learn to embrace the otherness within ourselves because this will enable us to accept the stranger and live together in peace. We can then do away with the sacrificial social contract, and create "'puzzle' states, that is, states that are constituted from several types of citizens" (Kristeva, "Cultural Strangeness" 40)--in Canada, the settler, the Native, the immigrant, the woman. If we cannot do so, we will continue to sacrifice the "other" in a fruitless attempt to deal with our own inadequacies.

Chapter 1: Alias Grace: "Female Demon Incarnate"

> I think of all the things that have been written about me--that I am an inhuman female demon, that I am an innocent victim . . . that I have the appearance of a person rather above my humble station, that I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of me, that I am cunning and devious, that I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot. And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once?
>
> --*Alias Grace*

Alias Grace, Margaret Atwood's most recent novel, fictionalizes the historical Grace Marks, "one of the most notorious Canadian women of the 1840s, having been convicted of murder at the age of sixteen" (Atwood, *AG*, afterword 555). In it, Atwood gives the fictional Grace a chance to tell a story which the historical Grace never could, a story of oppression and sacrifice, of frustration with a society that teaches her to desire wealth and social position but denies her any means of achieving them. Following her conviction, Grace was portrayed as an evil temptress, as a "'female demon incarnate'" (qtd. in *AG* 499). Here, for example, is how Susanna Moodie describes her in *Life in the Clearings*: "Among these raving maniacs I recognized the face of Grace Marks . . . lighted up with the fire of insanity, and glowing with a hideous and fiend-like merriment. . . . she fled shrieking away like a phantom" (qtd. in Atwood, *AG* 49). Grace became a "celebrated murderess," a description which fascinates her: "*Murderess* is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that word--musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase. Sometimes at night I whisper it over to myself: *Murderess, Murderess*. It rustles, like a taffeta skirt across the floor" (Atwood, *AG* 23; emphasis in text). Because of her notoriety, Grace was put on display--first like an animal in the zoo at the asylum where the public viewed the insane as a form of entertainment, then like a trained bear serving tea to the Governor's wife and her guests.

The Grace that the public sees is a construct of the media, of the courts, and of writers like Susanna Moodie. As Grace points out, she is presumed guilty even before the trial begins, and nothing she says or does can change this predetermined verdict since "once people make their minds up that you have done a crime, then anything you do is taken as proof of it" (426). Grace's lawyer confirms the media bias against her, claiming that at least one paper had "proposed . . . as fact, even before there was an inquest" that Grace helped McDermott strangle Nancy (448). Hilary Mantel reminds us that Moodie's depiction of the historical Grace Marks may have been colored by the media's influence (4), and her reliability is indeed questioned by characters in the novel: Dr. Jordan points out that Moodie portrayed Grace as "a gibbering madwoman, shrieking like a phantom and running about like a singed monkey" without knowing that Grace was sane enough to be released within the year (221), and Reverend Verringer suspects that Moodie's story of the bloodshot eyes haunting Grace was inspired more by reading Dickens than by anything Grace told her (222). Believing that she has broken its rules, society constructs Grace as an "other," as a demon/fiend/temptress onto whom it can displace all of its negative qualities.

By making Grace "not one of us," but a stranger, society avoids contemplating whether or not its own shortcomings are responsible for driving one of its members to commit such a crime. Representing Grace in this fashion also prevents people from relating to her, and thus seeing their own potential to act as she did. This is especially important for maintaining order because if women and members of the lower-class identify too strongly with Grace they might follow in her footsteps and react against their oppression instead of submitting to it. Atwood undoes Grace's "othering" by allowing us to see her as a person rebelling against an unjust society. A modern audience can relate to Grace in a way which those who judged her could not because we are not as immersed

in the class system, and so can understand Grace's desire for improvement more easily than we can understand the upper-class's belief in their right to oppress her.

Even before she is demonized, as an Irish servant girl in a society dominated by upper-class white males of British descent, Grace is "other." Because of her race, her class, and her gender, she makes an ideal sacrificial victim to the patriarchal/colonialist society of nineteenth-century Canada. Kristeva tells us that in western society "the social contract, far from being that of equal men, is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences" ("Women's Time" 23), differences of race, of gender, of class. Under this social contract, the norm is the white male and anyone outside his domain can be sacrificed to his interests. In a world ruled by the Law of the Father, Kristeva maintains, woman is the ideal sacrificial "other" (Reineke 84). She explains that "[s]exual difference--which is at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction--is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning" ("Women's Time" 21; emphasis in text), a difference which is detrimental to women. In the nineteenth-century the inequality of the social contract was spelled out legally: under British law (which also ruled Canada) women were not even considered "persons" until 1929.

Nineteenth-century Canadian society was structured by class, a particularly oppressive system since those at the top must suppress those at the bottom in order to retain their position of authority. The idea of knowing your place in the class system recurs frequently in *Alias Grace*. Susanna Moodie, for example, describes the historical Grace Marks as looking "like a person rather above her humble station" (qtd. in Atwood, 19), while Dr. Simon Jordan "has been spoiled by European servants, who are born knowing their places; he has not yet reaccustomed himself to the resentful demonstrations of equality so frequently practised on this side of the ocean" (64). To affirm their own

superiority--which the class system assures them is innate--the upper-class defines the lower as different and inferior, and so feels justified in oppressing them.

To help maintain their authority, the upper-class relies on the legal system, an institution recognized by many as an effective tool of oppression in the hands of the powerful (Girard 23). That Canada's laws sometimes served such a purpose is revealed in William Lyon Mackenzie's claim that "[t]he people had been long forbidden under severe pains and penalties from meeting anywhere to petition for justice" (qtd. in LeSueur 21).[1] Jeremiah, a peddler in *Alias Grace*, realizes that the "laws were not made by me or mine, but by the powers that be, and for their own profit" (316), and so feels justified in breaking them. Jeremiah, like Mackenzie and his Rebels, refuses to submit to laws designed to oppress him.

Since the legal system does not live up to its ideal to provide justice for all, it is in a state of crisis, as Grace's trial clearly reveals. As "other," Grace will not receive a fair trial: she will not be tried by a judge or jury of her peers, but by upper-class males who cannot identify with her circumstances. The law, a supposedly objective institution, is unduly influenced by outside forces which have nothing to do with justice, such as the opinions of the media and the public (446). Because of society's insistence on associating the crime with the Rebellion and Grace with the "Irish question" (90-91), the issue of her guilt is irrelevant to the outcome of the trial: she would receive exactly the same treatment and verdict whether she were innocent or guilty. The court is clearly willing to sacrifice her as a lesson to other members of the Irish community and the lower-class even though she had nothing whatsoever to do with the Rebellion. In light of this, Grace is crushingly naive in her belief that "Justice would not let me be hanged for something I hadn't done, and I would only have to tell the story as it happened, or as much of it as I could remember" in order to receive a fair verdict (Atwood 425).

Grace cannot afford to hire a lawyer, and because of her low social status the legal system does not seriously attempt to provide her with the high-quality defence to which she should be entitled. She shares her court-appointed lawyer with McDermott, a fact which Kenneth MacKenzie later admits prevents her from receiving a proper defence (447). At the time of Grace's trial, MacKenzie is a new graduate assigned by a firm that has no interest in winning the case, but wishes to see how spectacularly he can lose it. They will not waste experienced attorneys on pro bono cases, but see them as an ideal testing ground for junior members (447), even in cases as serious as this one. Luckily for Grace, MacKenzie manages to save her life.

The legal system does not fail the lower-class only when they are the accused, but also when they are the victims. Since Grace and McDermott have already been sentenced to death for Kinnear's murder, there is no trial for Nancy Montgomery's murder: even though she was killed first and it would have been easier to prove Grace's involvement in her death, there is no trial because Nancy, the servant, is not as important as Kinnear, the gentleman. Her death at the hands of her peers is not as shocking as Kinnear's murder by his inferiors, and does not have the same social implications. Because of Nancy's marginal position in society, her murder can go unpunished.

During Grace's lifetime, the dominance of the upper-class was starting to wane. Canada was rocked by social upheaval as the principles of democracy began to gain ground,[2] promoting equality for all, an ideal which collapses class distinctions and (theoretically) forbids the oppression of the "other." In democracy, Kristeva finds the potential (though it is far from being fulfilled as of yet) to harmonize "forms of difference" such as the differences of foreigners, "of women, of children, difference in sexual practices, and so forth" ("Cultural Strangeness" 36). In Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie, "the father of reforms," promoted the democratic cause by leading poor emigrants, mainly the Irish and the Scots, in a crusade for equality (Atwood, *AG* 446).

Such changes to the social structure, Kristeva warns us, often result in violence: "the social order is sacrificial, but sacrifice orders violence, binds it, tames it. Refusal of the social order exposes one to the risk" of even greater violence" ("Women's Time" 29). Although the move to democracy is positive (at least from a twentieth-century middle-class perspective), it has the potential to create chaos in a class-based society since people no longer know their places.

For a servant girl Mary Whitney harbours dangerously subversive thoughts, thoughts which Grace comes to share, although she denies their seriousness: for example, she recalls Mary saying "she would like to scalp Mrs. Alderman Parkinson, except that it would not be worth the trouble as her hair was not her own . . . . But it was just our way of talking, and no harm was meant" (Atwood 174). Contrary to Grace's claim, such ridicule is meant to harm. It provides one of the few methods available to the oppressed for defying the oppressor, and while it may not seem overly defiant, voicing such disapproval, even in private, reveals the servants' dissatisfaction with present conditions and their lack of respect for the upper-class. Those in positions of power find ridicule threatening because, as Regina Barreca explains, "[w]hen someone in a powerless position laughs at the one holding the reins, the figure of authority is sometimes shocked into an awareness of the tenuous nature of any form of control" (58). Barreca emphasizes the subversive power of laughter, which "always indicates a refusal to take authority seriously" (59), and claims that "[i]f you can laugh at your enemy . . . you are in the position of power" (56). Furthermore, Georges Bataille explains that laughter creates a communal bond which allows those who share it to feel superior to those against whom it is directed (70). While ridiculing their masters, the servants bond with each other--as we see happen with Grace and Mary--giving them the strength to defy the authority of the upper-class. It is extremely difficult for the oppressor to retain

control over those who no longer respect their authority, and what begins as ridicule may escalate into social upheaval and violence.

As the upper-class struggle to retain the power they see slipping out of their hands, they become particularly vigilant, indeed even paranoid, in their lookout for transgressions by the lower-class. This helps explain society's insistence on associating Grace's alleged crime with the Rebellion. According to Reverend Verringer, for example, the "'Tories appear to have confused Grace with the Irish Question, although she is a Protestant; and to consider the murder of a single Tory gentleman . . . to be the same thing as the insurrection of an entire race'" (90-91). Likewise, Grace's lawyer explains that "'William Lyon Mackenzie took the part of the poor Scots and Irish . . . . Birds of a feather, was what they thought,'" and they "'were all for hanging her, and William Lyon Mackenzie as well, and anyone else thought to harbour republican sentiments'" (446). Kinnear's murder is perceived as such a great threat because it is one example of the insubordination destroying the class system. "Mr. Kinnear was a gentleman of a fine Scottish family" (234), and society is appalled that McDermott dared to lay violent hands on his "superior." In her afterword, Atwood explains that Canadians a century ago were obsessed by this crime because of the "combination of sex, violence, and *the deplorable insubordination of the lower classes*" (*AG* 555, emphasis mine).

Kinnear's murder and the Rebellion show us that sacrificing the "other" may engender violence instead of preventing it since the oppressed often react violently to their victimization. McDermott, for example, tells Grace that he hates the upper-class because "they were all thieves and whores, and stealers of land, and ground down the poor wherever they went; and . . . Mr. Kinnear . . . deserved to be knocked on the head and thrown down into the cellar" (304). He eventually acts on his hostility. Kristeva offers this explanation for the violent reaction of the oppressed:

> when a subject is too brutally excluded from [the] sociosymbolic stratum; when, for example, a woman feels her affective life as a woman or her condition as a social being too brutally ignored by existing discourse or power (from her family to social institutions); she may, by counterinvesting the violence she has endured, make of herself a "possessed" agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration. ("Women's Time" 28)

The term "'possessed' agent" is particularly fitting for Grace since she may be literally possessed by the angry spirit of Mary Whitney. If this is indeed the case, Mary uses Grace's body to take revenge on Kinnear for the sad fate she suffered because of her affair with a man of his class (Atwood, *AG* 481). Rejecting their role as society's sacrificial victims, McDermott, Mary/Grace, and the Rebels who fight with Mackenzie turn the violence they have suffered back against their oppressors.

Such violence can also result from mimetic desire which drives one to want what another has in order to become like him/her. Mimetic desire is not object-driven, Kristeva explains, since "one identifies 'not with an object, but with what offers itself to me as a model'" (qtd. in Reineke 82). Seeing the high value that the privileged upper-class, which serves as the "model" in the class system, places on wealth and social position, members of the denigrated lower-class learn to desire them. This is not so much a desire for the attributes themselves as a hope that by possessing them one will become upper-class (and thus be spared any further oppression). Society creates the potential for violence by teaching the oppressed to covet the unattainable, to crave the benefits of wealth and class which they have no legitimate means of obtaining.

As well, violence may result from the desire of the upper-class model to preserve its distance from the lower-class subject:

> the closer [the subject] comes to acquisition of the object of the model's desire and through that acquisition, to the model, the greater is the rejection or refusal of the subject by the model. . . . Veneration and rejection, mimesis and difference structure the subject's experience of the world until, in a shocking denouement of the dynamic of rivalry that sees the difference between the subject and its model obliterated by their common desire, the model becomes the monstrous double by whom the subject is repulsed and from whom it seeks distance. . . . Desire becomes death. So announced, the mimetic crisis ends in the violent resolution of the subject's quest for being. (Reineke 74)[3]

The closer the lower-class comes to acquiring the privileges of the upper-class, the more strenuously the upper-class struggles to maintain its superiority by preventing the lower-class from achieving its goal. Furthermore, as differences between the classes become less distinct, the lower-class loses the awe it once felt for the upper-class, and may come to regard it as a repulsive evil which must be destroyed.

Mimetic desire endangers the social structure when the subject's drive to obtain a desired object causes him/her to break society's rules. The serving women in *Alias Grace*, for example, have no hope of raising their social standing except through marriage, but men of the higher class are forbidden to them. Any attempt to attain the wealthy husband which society has programmed them to desire requires a transgression of its rules--an illicit affair for example--for which they will be condemned. Kinnear's affair with Nancy and his general disdain for public opinion encourage Grace to hope that he could love her despite her low social status. When they first meet, Kinnear has Grace sit up front in the wagon with him, ignoring the rules of appropriate conduct which would set him apart from his servant. By making Grace feel as if she were "a fine lady" (242), Kinnear gives her reason to dream of the possibility that he could fall in love and marry

her. Despite Kinnear's willingness to publicly transgress certain boundaries, however, it seems highly unlikely that he would go so far as to marry a servant girl. In fact, Grace assumes that Kinnear will turn Nancy out of his home when he learns of his housekeeper's pregnancy (369). Nancy shares Grace's desire for Kinnear, bringing the two women into conflict--a conflict which eventually results in Nancy's death. Both women are victims of a society that does not offer them legitimate means of improvement, but instead causes them to fight one another for a man with whom neither could live respectably, for even if Kinnear had married one of the women, she would never have been accepted by his society.

As a low-class serving woman, Grace's respectability is suspect: if she had been a "lady" instead of a servant, society would have been far more likely to believe her claim that she did not help McDermott murder Kinnear and Nancy, and that she fled with him because she feared he would kill her if she refused, not because she wanted to be his paramour. Grace and her fellow serving women, Mary and Nancy, have no one to protect them: men can do as they please with these women without fear of reprisal. Grace, for example, realizes that she has to leave a well-paying job when the master of the house tries to break into her room since she will be the one condemned if people learn about his behaviour (232). While an affair between members of different classes was regarded as a minor transgression for the upper-class male, it could be a death sentence for the lower-class female, especially if she became pregnant--not that she was legally sentenced to death, but that she often died as a result of the limited options available to the unwed mother. Men at this time were rarely forced to assume financial responsibility for their illegitimate offspring, and without financial support from the father, the single pregnant woman had only three options, as Mary Whitney explains, since no respectable person would hire her: she could go to a home for unwed mothers; she could have an abortion; or she could become a prostitute. Mary claims that babies born in such homes

were often smothered--a theory confirmed by the Butterbox Babies, and by Grace's lawyer who assumes that Nancy's illegitimate baby "died . . . of midwives' mercy" (449). Her ruined reputation makes it nearly impossible for the mother to find a job afterwards unless, like Nancy, she is hired because of her reputation by a man hoping to take advantage of her loose morals (301). Since abortions were illegal at this time, they were usually performed under terrible conditions. The operation was extremely risky, and if it were botched, as Mary's was, a woman could not go to another doctor for fear her crime would be reported, so she usually died. The final resort, prostitution, was a dangerous, disease-ridden life which no woman survived for long. Society could not tolerate lower-class women bearing the children of upper-class men because they threatened to erase class distinctions, and while gentlemen got out of most affairs unscathed, women were punished severely, often paying for their "sin" with their lives or their virtue.

The Madonna/whore dichotomy for women is typical of a patriarchal society. In the afterword to *Alias Grace*, Atwood comments on the nineteenth-century's "ambiguity about the nature of women: was Grace a female fiend and temptress . . . or was she an unwilling victim" (556). Such a dichotomy leads to violence against women since those who cannot live up to angelic standards can only be the devil, and so must be exterminated. This attitude is exemplified by Jamie's reaction to Grace after she flees with McDermott: "from being an angel in [Jamie's] eyes, and fit to be idolized and worshipped, I was transformed to a demon, and he would do all in his power to destroy me" (433). If Jamie had accepted Grace as she truly was instead of seeing her as idealized "woman," he would not have felt so betrayed and would not have had such hostility towards her. Once he sees her as the evil "other," however, he feels compelled to try to destroy her.

In a world where women are judged as either virtuous or wicked Grace must be either pure good or absolute evil, there is no middle ground. And while it is easy enough

to fall from virtue into sin, it is nearly impossible to regain lost virtue. Not surprisingly, the distinction between virtue and immorality often parallels class divisions: the daughter of a prostitute is assumed to be of poor moral fibre, and is given little opportunity but to follow in her mother's footsteps; daughters of the upper-class, on the other hand, are assumed to be paragons of virtue, and people go to great lengths to preserve their innocence, or at least the image of it. Although Dr. Jordan, for example, has seen far too much of the world to believe in the "innate refinement of women," he regards this as "all the more reason to safeguard the purity of those" who, like the Governor's daughter Lydia, have the advantages of a good family and are "still pure" (100). Shocked by Lydia's wish that she could have attended McDermott's execution, Simon informs her that "[w]omen should not attend such grisly spectacles . . . . They pose a danger to their refined natures" (99). He is naively convinced that nineteen-year-old Lydia is "unconscious of the effect" that their physical contact has on him, assuming that she is "*necessarily* ignorant of the nature of such effects" (98-99; emphasis mine) because she belongs to a class which should have shielded her from any knowledge of sexual relations. Lydia's unusually rushed marriage (509), however, makes it clear that despite society's belief to the contrary, she is not, by nature, any purer than the daughter of a prostitute who is automatically assumed to be a whore.

Dr. Jordan's attitude towards Lydia reveals his society's agenda to erase all sexual desire from women. Patriarchal societies tend to fear women's sexuality and so demonize it, forcing women to renounce their desires if they wish to be accepted. Continual attempts to repress natural sexual desires perverts them, however, so the "virtuous" ladies in the novel often link sex with death. They see Dr. Jordan as

> one of the dark trio--the doctor, the judge, the executioner . . . [who share] the power of life and death. To be rendered unconscious; to lie exposed, without shame, at the mercy of others; to be touched, incised,

> plundered, remade--this is what they are thinking of when they look at him, with their widening eyes and slightly parted lips. (Atwood, *AG* 93)

If women were allowed to express their sexuality instead of maintaining the virtuous facade that society imposes upon them, they would be less likely to equate desire with pain, torture, and death. Jordan himself acknowledges that the as-yet unrepressed Lydia is "healthy-minded, unlike [her] mother" (98), and although he is too much a product of his society to see it, this difference can probably be attributed to Lydia's undenied sexuality. Women forced to repress their natural desires become trapped in a "vortex of summons and repulsion" (Kristeva, *Powers* 1), unable to rid themselves of desire because it is a natural biological drive, but repulsed by it because they believe it is evil. It comes as little surprise then, when one considers that the unmarried woman, who is forced into the most extreme repression by the high value placed on her virtue and the lack of legitimate outlets for her sexuality, is, according to *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, particularly prone to hysterics (qtd. in Atwood, *AG* 157)--a physical manifestation of her severe psychic distress. Hopelessly conflicted, the sexually repressed woman becomes Kristeva's abject, threatening society with forbidden desires which cannot be forever contained.

The abject, Kristeva theorizes, is both sacred and vilified (*Powers* 17). Finding it repulsive, yet, at the same time, irresistibly fascinating (*Powers* 1), society strives to banish or destroy the abject in order to contain its destructive potential. Threatening, and endowed with special powers, the abject makes the ultimate sacrifice. This novel's paradoxical title warns us of Grace's dual nature: as *Alias* she is deceptive, using an assumed name to conceal herself from the law; conversely, as *Grace* she is "beauty or harmony of motion form or manner," and "pleasing to God." Phonetically, alias reminds us of alien, the ultimate "other"; in fact, the Latin root for alien is *alius*--"another" (*Funk & Wagnell's*). Simultaneously evil and sacred, Grace is abject. She "disturbs identity,

system, order" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4), which makes her a threat to the existing social structure. She eludes categorization, as conflicting descriptions of her show: "I am an inhuman female demon . . . I am an innocent victim . . . I have blue eyes . . . I have green eyes . . . I have auburn and also brown hair . . . I am of a sullen disposition with a quarrelsome temper . . . I am a good girl with a pliable nature . . . I am cunning and devious" (Atwood, *AG* 23). This is frightening because that which cannot be categorized cannot be contained, and so wreaks havoc on order.

Kristeva explains that abjection "is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles" (*Powers* 4). Anyone who could commit the crimes of which Grace is accused and maintain her innocence with such sincerity would fit Kristeva's description, and Grace's lawyer is convinced of her guilt (454). And Dr. Jordan, who wishes to be her knight in shining armour, detects a "cunning look in the corner of her eye . . . she's concealing something from him" (435). Even readers should not trust Grace completely since we, like Dr. Jordan, may be victims of her manipulation: Grace tells us only what she wants us to know, and paints herself in a favorable light. In an attempt to contain Grace, society incarcerates her after her trial. The abject is not so easily controlled however, since "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (Kristeva, *Powers* 2), but calls to him, playing upon his fascination with and desire for that which has been cast out. Figures of authority are certainly irresistibly drawn to Grace: Simon Jordan, for example, spends months with her trying to uncover her deepest, darkest secrets; others like Reverend Verringer work for years to obtain her pardon; and the Governor's wife simultaneously horrifies and fascinates her guests by showing them a scrapbook full of clippings about Grace and the murders as Grace serves them tea--a tamed murderess who could turn violent at any moment.

In the nineteenth-century jails and asylums were brutal. Punishment in the prisons were frequent and severe, including whippings, and prisoners were tormented by the

guards. It was rumoured at Grace's penitentiary that the previous warden's son "'was permitted to use the convicts for target practice. . . . There was talk of his abusing the female prisoners also'" (89). Such abuse also occurred at the asylum, and while Grace was there it was suspected that she became pregnant. Only someone in a position of authority, probably a doctor, could have raped her (*AG*, afterword 557)--for if she were insane, even if she were willing she could not be consenting. Patients at the asylum are on public display, and Grace says that the matrons would provoke them before visiting hour "to show how dangerous we were, but also how well they could control us" (34). The public comes to watch, fascinated by the open display of emotions and behaviour which are considered taboo in society, and irresistibly drawn to the battle between the abject and authority. The abuse endured in these institutions ensures that the abject will either be reformed to conform to society's standards, or--and this seems far more likely--destroyed.

The ultimate sign of Grace's abjection is her alleged possession. If Mary Whitney's spirit does indeed enter Grace's body, it exhibits the abject's striking lack of respect for "borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). When Mary speaks during Grace's hypnosis, she explains that she merely borrowed Grace's "clothing . . . . Her earthly shell. Her fleshly garment." (482-83). Our bodies establish us as individual entities, allowing us to distinguish between "self" and "other," so we guard their boundaries strenuously and find the concept of occupation by another terrifying: possession is a "boundary failure . . . which poses a radical threat to subjectivity" (Reineke 26-27). Witnesses to Grace's hypnosis are so horrified by her possession that no one tells her what transpired and Dr. Jordan flees forever.

Although those who attend the hypnosis seem to take Grace's possession at face value, it warrants a psychoanalytic reading. In fact, in his quest for Grace's pardon, Reverend Verringer offers this explanation for her possession: "Grace Marks displayed .

. . pronounced evidence of a somnambulistic *double consciousness*, with a distinct secondary personality, capable of acting without the knowledge of the first" (517; emphasis in text). Working from Freud, Kristeva explains how the "distraught self . . . protects itself" by creating "the image of a malevolent double into which it expels the share of destruction it cannot contain" (*Strangers* 184). Grace could be denying the other within herself--repressing all her rage, greed, and hostility--by naming it as a separate entity, Mary Whitney, which is distinct from Grace Marks even though it occupies her body. Like Mary, Nancy could serve as Grace's "malevolent double" or "somnambulistic double consciousness." Since we see Nancy only through Grace's envious eyes we do not know how accurate the depiction is, but it is inconsistent: at times she and Nancy seem to be close friends, but at other times they are bitter enemies. Grace blames this discrepancy on Nancy's jealousy (eg 328), but it could be Grace's envy that causes her to see and treat Nancy differently when Kinnear is present. Projecting her negativity onto Nancy would allow Grace to see her as wicked and inferior, thus making Grace more worthy of Kinnear and justifying Nancy's murder.

The "cure" for abjection lies in reinterpolating the abject as a subject,[4] a process which begins with the somatic work of violent intrusions into the body such as those the upper-class women in *Alias Grace* imagine. Their fantasies of being tortured, of "incursions into soma" (Reineke 152), evoke a Kristevian return to the maternal matrix. The idea of torture is seductive because by returning to the soma women escape the rule of the Father, rejoining a maternal world. Despite the appeal of this, women know that if they are to remain a part of society (and it is very difficult to live outside the symbolic) they must return to the realm of the Father, and so wish to be "remade," to be completely interpolated so that they no longer have desires which are not permitted in the patriarchal world. To reinstate the authority of the Symbolic, the upper-class women in the novel imagine themselves being tortured, reenacting in this "crossing into and out of [soma]"

the subject's initial struggle to escape the semiotic and enter the realm of the Symbolic (Reineke 90). Since the women had "initially garnered and secured a place in the world by means of somatic contestation . . . they . . . recreate their position in the world" (Reineke 152) by imagining a physical assault on the flesh which represses the drives and desires of the maternal body in favor of paternal law. In order to reestablish their not quite successful interpolation, to be "remade" as complete patriarchal subjects, these women must be "plundered" by a man of authority.

Dr. Jordan probes Grace's brain much as torturers probe the bodies of their victims, trying to cure her by unearthing secrets she does not even want to know, let alone share. She does not enter therapy willingly, but is forced to submit to it as her only chance of ever leaving prison. This is a violent intrusion into her psyche, especially since Grace is so resistant to the doctor's questioning: she refuses to tell him of her dreams for example, because "I have little enough of my own, no belongings, no possessions, no privacy to speak of, and I need to keep something for myself" (114). Jordan thinks that by getting into Grace's mind, by learning all of her secrets, he will be able to reform her, to make her fit for society. Hypnosis appears to succeed where psychiatry failed, probing violently into Grace's psyche and pulling out the spirit of Mary Whitney who, although Grace does not know it, has possessed her. Hypnosis and psychiatry provide means of digging into a resistant body, and so can be considered forms of "somatic contestation."

Legal executions, like torture, are an attempt by society to maintain social order, and, in fact, share many of the features of blood sacrifice: both are ritualistic killings sanctioned by authority, and both serve as a focal point for violence in the community, allowing it be channeled and dispersed. At an execution, as at a sacrifice, society comes together to see the destruction of someone who threatened the social order, allowing the citizens to direct all of their frustrations towards a scapegoat, and thereby strengthening their sense of community. The public band together in "violent unanimity," venting all of

their hostility on the victim so they have none left for each other (Girard 81). Girard explains that for a sacrifice to function successfully the entire community must be involved, so, although the legal system cannot allow the public to actively participate in a trial or an execution, it encourages them to participate by watching: when Grace goes to trial, for example, "so many people crushed into the courthouse that the floor gave way" (432).

After McDermott's hanging, a reporter laments the "morbid appetite for such sights, [which] must exist in society, when so large an assemblage . . . had collected, to witness the dying agony, of an unfortunate but criminal fellow being!" (99). The crowd's enthusiasm for the trial and the hanging, which many regard as grand entertainment, gives these events a festive atmosphere. Although the celebratory mood may seem morbid, it is not, from Girard's perspective, surprising since the "function of the festival is no different from the function of other sacrificial rites. . . . [T]he festival revitalizes the cultural order by reenacting its conception, . . . the moment when the fear of falling into interminable violence is most intense and the community is therefore most closely drawn together" (120). Viewing a death reminds the living of the precariousness of life (Kristeva, *Powers* 3), and they may bond over this out of a need to affirm their own existence, their position with the living, and deny any connection with the dead. Perhaps the apparent festivity is not so much a celebration of the criminal's death as of the witnesses's escape from violence: watching the legal system remove a threat to society, the viewers revel in their restored sense of security and community.

Questions about the efficacy of public executions are raised however. The reporter asks if "public morals are improved, or the tendency to the commission of flagrant crimes repressed, by such public sights as these" (99). Dr. Jordan feels they may have the opposite effect and so "disapproves of public executions, which are unhealthily exciting and produce bloodthirsty fancies in the weaker-minded part of the population"

(99). When the very ritual intended to create peace instead engenders violence, Girard explains, society is in a state of "sacrificial crisis" (39). Because of this crisis, the sense of restored harmony created by McDermott's hanging is illusory: Canadian society is changing as the lower-class gains rights and no amount of sacrifice will restore the upper-class to its previous power.

Still, the public's bloodlust is temporarily satiated by McDermott's hanging, so society does not object when Grace is sentenced to life imprisonment instead of death, and does not insist that she be tried for Nancy's murder. If she had been, her lawyer claims, Grace would most definitely have hung (454). The question of Grace's guilt is intriguingly--and at times frustratingly--complex. At first, it seems as if McDermott, a "notorious liar" (452), may be fabricating her involvement. Grace's lawyer, in fact, believes that "[w]hen McDermott asserted that Grace helped him in his strangling escapade, he may very well have got the idea from the Kingston *Chronicle and Gazette*" (448). Grace herself seems unsure of her involvement (352), and gives several contradictory versions of events, making it impossible for anyone to know what to believe (450). The possibility of insanity is also raised on several occasions (90, 447 etc.). Finally, through Grace's hypnosis, we learn that her hands did indeed help McDermott strangle Nancy, but that Grace was not responsible for their actions since she was possessed by Mary Whitney's spirit. Even the possession is not simple, however. Is this a literal possession? Is it the surfacing of hostilities which Grace has repressed as Mary Whitney? Or, as Dr. Jordan wonders, is it merely an act (487)? Grace's alleged possession does not provide a cut and dry verdict on her guilt--as chroniclers of the past did--but forces the reader to ponder her culpability.

Atwood makes Grace the most sympathetic character in *Alias Grace*, and tells much of the story from her perspective so we can understand why things happened the way they did, or at least why Grace sees them as she does. From this viewpoint, we see

that if society had not been such a hostile and oppressive place for the lower-class and for women, Kinnear and Nancy might never have been murdered. Kristeva explains that our only hope for a peaceful society, one based on mutual respect rather than oppression and sacrifice, comes through learning to accept the other within ourselves so that we can embrace it when we encounter it in another (*Strangers* 192). Atwood embraces the "other," and encourages her readers to do the same, by recuperating Grace's story, by giving voice to one woman silenced in Canada's past.

After nearly thirty years of imprisonment, Grace is finally allowed to reenter society. She is no longer deemed a threat to order because of her upstanding behaviour during her incarceration and because society itself has changed somewhat during this time. The "Irish Question," which negatively influenced her trial, is not the issue it once was: the fervor surrounding the Rebellion has abated to the point where Kenneth MacKenzie can say of William Lyon Mackenzie, "I would almost rather claim kin than not; it isn't the disadvantage now that it once was, and the old boy has long since been pardoned, and is seen as the father of reforms" (446). The man who was once an enemy of the state is now a hero, and Grace, whose trial was biased because of a presumed relationship between her alleged crime and his cause, can go free. That she committed a crime against a member of the upper-class is not as shocking now as it was thirty years earlier since the class system has eroded considerably. A definite sign of this erosion comes when the Warden's daughter tells Grace that she looks like a "real lady," and Grace thinks it "is possible, as there is less difference in dress between maid and mistress now than there used to be" (533). There is also the simple matter of the passage of time: murders committed three decades ago are not fresh in the public's mind, and since their need for vengeance was satisfied long ago with McDermott's hanging, they now have little interest in the case--so little, in fact, that news of Grace's release does not even make the newspapers (527). While the growth of democracy is positive, in Grace's time it does

not come close to achieving its ideal state of equality for all. Despite the changes to the social order, her society still marginilizes the "other" instead of accepting it: those in authority will continue to distinguish themselves on the basis of race and gender, and those outside the circle of power will continue to be sacrificed to its agenda.

Alias Grace seems to end on a positive note since Grace is free, married to a man who has loved her since his youth, and hopes she may be pregnant. But, since this is a novel filled with abjection, the ending is, of course, ambiguous. Although she may be pregnant, Grace also acknowledges that she could have a tumour, and that the life she is celebrating might instead be her death (550). Her loving husband has a sadomasochistic streak, and enjoys their lovemaking most after Grace tells him stories of her suffering and allows him to grovel for her forgiveness. Initially, Grace assures him that he was not responsible for the outcome of her trial, but she soon realizes that he does not want to be absolved of guilt, but prefers to wallow in it. Finally, although Grace is no longer considered a threat to society, she may still be possessed--whether spiritually or as an embodiment of repression--and so could still be dangerous if some desire caused "Mary" to awaken once again.

As her unexorcised possession warns us, when Grace is freed she conforms only on the surface, but does not do so in spirit. As he leaves Grace for the last time, Dr. Jordan realizes that she "eludes him. She glides ahead of him, just out of his grasp, turning her head to see if he's still following" (488). Jordan is frustrated and angry because, despite the months he worked with her and researched her case, he cannot pin Grace's character down, and cannot get over his fascination with her. He writes to a friend, "*Not to know*--to snatch at hints and portents, at intimations, at tantalizing whispers--it is as bad as being haunted. Sometimes at night her face floats before me in the darkness, like some lovely and enigmatic mirage" (506; emphasis in text). Compelling and elusive, potentially evil but perhaps an innocent victim--contrary to society's belief,

Grace is not "cured," but remains the abject which "cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva, *Powers* 1). I cannot help but think that this notion of Grace as not-completely subject, free in society and still threatening, would appeal to Kristeva who is

> very attached to the idea of the woman as irrecuperable foreigner. . . . [O]ne can be positive by starting with this permanent marginality, which is the motor of change. . . . And to try to preserve this part as unreconcilable permits us perhaps always to be . . . a sort of separate vigilance that keeps groups from closing up, from becoming homogenous and so oppressive. That is, I see the role of women as a sort of vigilance, a strangeness, as always to be on guard and contestatory. ("Cultural Strangeness" 45)

Grace and the child she may be carrying represent the possibility for a society that is more truly democratic, "a democracy of the multiple" ("Cultural Strangeness" 43) that can accept the "other" instead of trying to banish, destroy, or assimilate it.

The final image of the novel is a Tree of Paradise that Grace is quilting, complete with a "border of snakes entwined . . . as without a snake or two, the main part of the story would be missing" (551). In it, she will include scraps of cloth that once belonged to Mary and Nancy "so we will all be together" (552). Grace understands that without the threat of evil there would be no sacred,[5] and that only by incorporating the evil or abject into the sacred can she have a complete pattern instead of one riddled with absences.

Chapter 2: The Sacrificed Native in *Green Grass, Running Water*

> As long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn't mean anything. It was a metaphor. Eli knew that. Every Indian on the reserve knew that. Treaties were hardly sacred documents. They were contracts, and no one signed a contract for eternity. No one.
>
> --*Green Grass, Running Water*

Like the woman's voice, that of the Native has long been ignored in our patriarchal system. In *Green Grass, Running Water*, Native author Thomas King offers us a Native perspective, which is not commonly found in literature, on the Natives' struggle to maintain a distinct identity in the face of encroaching settler culture. In this novel, the ominous presence of the white world is represented by the Grand Baleen Dam which threatens the Natives' ability to preserve their lifestyle. By locating the dam on Native land, the government breaks treaty promises: "the novel's title . . . reiterates and transforms a phrase known all too well to Indian people: the (in)famous promise by the United States Government that they would honor their treaties for 'as long as the grass is green and the waters run'" (Donaldson 29). Laura Donaldson considers dams "perhaps the most effective technology yet developed for the genocidal annihilation of Native cultures. One need only think of the Tennessee Valley Authority which, with one flick of a switch . . . buried the ancient heart of Cherokee culture to realize the irreplaceable losses engineered by this technology" (39). In *Green Grass*, Eli Stands Alone fights the dam in court, but although he gets temporary injunctions preventing it from operating, the case drags on for years as the law hesitates to rule against a major corporation and the government. Eli ensures that Duplessis cannot open the sluice gates and flood the prairie by moving into his dead mother's cabin at the foot of the dam (114; 260).

As we see in *Green Grass*, the voice of the "other" not only tells different stories, it also tells stories differently. According to Native scholar Paula Gunn Allen, "[t]he structure of tribal narratives . . . is quite unlike that of western fiction; it is not tied to any particular time line, main character, or event" (79). She explains that "[t]raditional tribal narratives possess a circular structure, incorporating event within event, piling meaning upon meaning, until the accretion finally results in a story" (79). King's novel follows the circular pattern of the Native oral tradition by repeating variations of the same story: four old Indians each take a turn telling the tale of a Native spirit Woman who falls out of the sky, rejects a biblical narrative, and adopts the persona of a white cultural or literary icon.

Interspersed among these narratives are the stories of a "real" Native community. This mixture of the natural and the supernatural is a common trait of Native literature, which does not "draw a hard and fast line between what is material and what is spiritual, for it regards the two as different expressions of the same reality. . . . Consequently, the unity of the whole is preserved and reflected in language, literature, and thought, and arbitrary divisions of the universe into 'divine' and 'worldly' or 'natural' and 'unnatural' do not occur" (Allen 60-61). In *Green Grass*, the fantastic becomes part of the everyday as the old Indians and their companion, the trickster Coyote, interact with "real" characters.

Unlike traditional western literature, which generally revolves around a protagonist and his/her antagonist, *Green Grass* does not have one main character, but a number of characters of about equal importance. Since it "leans towards the group rather than the single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of the members of a community," it fits King's classification of "associational literature" (King, "Godzilla" 14). Different members of the Band and several outsiders take turns telling their stories, providing us with a kaleidoscope of shifting events and perspectives. All of these stories converge at certain points. Towards the end of the first

section of the novel, for example, Alberta, Lionel, and two police officers are in different places, but each asks the same question: "Where did the water come from?" (98). A few pages before the end of the second section, eight characters in different locations are reading or watching old Westerns which the four old Indians decide to "fix" up (223). Close to the end of the third section Lionel, Charlie, Eli, and Bill Bursum watch the "fixed" Westerns, amazed to see the Indians beat John Wayne and the cavalry (322). Just before the novel ends, all of the characters come together at Blossom to witness the destruction of the dam which sets the water free.

Green Grass begins (like Genesis) with the story of creation: "In the beginning, there was nothing. Just the water" (1). Variations on this line are repeated again and again as characters start new stories (e.g. 91; 96; 100), and the end of the novel brings us back to its beginning as Coyote denies understanding what s/he has heard so far--and one cannot help suspecting s/he feigns ignorance for the pleasure of the story--forcing the narrator to begin the tale of creation yet again: "In the beginning, there was just the water" (431). This circular structure illustrates "the American Indian [tendency] to view space as spherical and time as cyclical." The "non-Indian", on the other hand, "tends to view space as linear and time as sequential" (Allen 59). Given that both Natives and women make appropriate sacrificial victims in a patriarchal/colonial world, perhaps it is not surprising that they share a similar conception of time: Kristeva explains that in the cyclical time woman experiences, "there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*" ("Women's Time" 16; emphasis in text). This radically different perception of time, which contradicts the patriarchal conception of time as linear and chronological,

challenges and potentially subverts the dominant ideology by calling its truth into question and providing the "other" with a position of strength, of freedom, of resistance.

Although many would classify *Green Grass, Running Water* as a postcolonial novel, King resists this label for Native literature, finding that it

> reeks of unabashed ethnocentrism and well-meaning dismissal . . . . the term itself assumes that the starting point . . . is the advent of Europeans in North America. . . . [T]he idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question . . . . Ironically, while the term itself--post-colonial--strives to escape to find new centres, it remains, in the end, a hostage to nationalism. ("Godzilla" 11-12)

Of the terms which King prefers to describe Native literature, "polemical" and "associational" best define *Green Grass*. Polemical literature

> concerns itself with the clash of Native and non-Native cultures or with the championing of Native values over non-Native values. . . . [It] chronicles the imposition of non-Native expectations and insistences (political, social, scientific) on Native communities and the methods of resistance employed by Native people in order to maintain both their communities and cultures. ("Godzilla" 13)

But although *Green Grass* is about the conflict between the two cultures, white presence is minimal and there is little direct confrontation; instead, the novel focuses on the Native community and the people's daily lives. Because of this, it can also be classified as "associational literature" which "avoids centering the story on the non-Native community or on a conflict between the two cultures, concentrating instead on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life" ("Godzilla" 14).

According to King, associational literature "eschews judgments and conclusions" ("Godzilla" 14), and he passes no judgment on his Native characters, but always treats them sympathetically. In contrast, the Christian narratives in *Green Grass* are loaded with patriarchal authority, full of judgment and rules.[1] First Woman and Ahdamn, for instance, leave the Garden of Eden because she refuses to comply with the "Christian rules" of a selfish, authoritarian GOD who refuses to share his food (69). The futility of following Christian rules, which are invented for and interpreted by the white man in charge--and it is always a white man in charge--to suit his whims, is seen in the narrative about Noah whose first rule is that "'Thou Shalt Have Big Breasts'"; despite his wife's "'great big breasts'" he throws her overboard because "'[i]t's the rules'" (147). When Changing Woman refuses to procreate with Noah he deserts her, informing her that "'This is a Christian ship . . . . I am a Christian man. This is a Christian journey. And if you can't follow our Christian rules, then you're not wanted on the voyage'" (148).[2] Like the authority figures in these narratives, the Canadian government--consisting predominantly of older white males--does not want Natives "on the voyage" unless they conform to white society, and so is willing to destroy their culture by building dams on their territory, preventing them from preserving their traditional lifestyle and forcing them to assimilate into the white world. Like Noah, the government interprets "the rules" to its own benefit and so feels free to break the treaty promises it made a century earlier.

Patriarchy makes for a competitive, conflict-driven society because in order to have power you must be suppressing someone; there is no position of authority unless there are subjects to have authority over. In this divided society, those with power sacrifice those without in order to retain their dominance and reinforce their superiority. To justify oppression, the powerful cannot permit themselves to see the "other" as they actually are, but assign them to categories which prove their inferiority. Allen explains that for the white man, there are two types of Indians, "the noble savage and the howling

savage. The noble savage is seen as the appealing but doomed victim of the inevitable evolution of humanity from primitive to postindustrial social orders. . . . [T]he noble savage [is allowed] to be the guardian of the wilds and on occasion the conscience of ecological responsibility" (4-5). Advocates of this doctrine believe "that Indians have to assimilate or perish" (5). This Native represents a dying breed who can be safely consigned to the history books as a people with a romantic past but no present or future, deprived of all agency. Howling or "hostile savages," on the other hand, "capture white ladies and torture them, obstruct the westward movement of peaceable white settlers, and engage in bloodthirsty uprisings in which they glory in the massacre of innocent colonists and pioneers." This view, so enthusiastically embraced by popular culture, "forms the basis for much of the social oppression" the Native experiences (5). For the white man, the stereotypical savage makes for a colorful story--as King's emphasis on Western novels and movies reminds us--but Natives in the real world create undesirable complications by demanding agency and refusing to conform to their stereotypical roles.

In *Green Grass* stereotypes constantly threaten the Native reality. For example, Portland Looking Bear, a Native actor, is forced to wear a rubber nose because his own does not look Indian enough (152). Nasty Bumppo describes a stereotypical Indian to Old Woman:

> Indians can run fast. Indians can endure pain. Indians have quick reflexes. Indians don't talk much. Indians have good eyesight. Indians have agile bodies. These are all Indian gifts . . . .Whites are patient. Whites are spiritual. Whites are cognitive. Whites are philosophical. Whites are sophisticated. Whites are sensitive. These are all white gifts . . . .
>
> So, says Old Woman. Whites are superior, and Indians are inferior.

Exactly right, says Nasty Bumppo. Any questions? (393)

The text makes a mockery of this stereotype, however, since Nasty is a trigger-happy fool who cannot (or will not) distinguish between a deer and Old Coyote (393), and Old Woman is his intellectual and spiritual better. People create damaging stereotypes like these because, as Kristeva explains, the self wants an "other" onto which it can project "out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself" (*Strangers* 183).

When the settler subject emphasizes the differences between himself and the Native, he does so in order to repress his knowledge of how much alike they actually are. While it seems as if the "other" is sacrificed because of its differences, in reality, it is sacrificed because it is not different enough, according to Girard. Analyzing his theory of non-differentiation, Reineke explains:

> What bothers heterosexuals, ethnic and religious majorities, and the able-bodied about those who are different--gays and lesbians, the ethnically and religiously diverse, the disabled--is the potential they see in those persons 'for the system to differ from its own difference, in other words not to be different at all, to cease to exist as a system' . . . . The relativity, fragility, and mortality of one's own small world is put into relief by the one who is different. Different persons are reproached not for their difference, but for being not as different as expected, and in the end for differing not at all . . .
>
> In failing to respect 'real' differences, those who are 'not-different-enough' incur others' anger and bring down upon themselves . . . the violence that would defend difference. (144)

By not living exactly as their ancestors did one hundred years ago, by proving their ability to function in the modern world, Natives deprive the white of the role he has traditionally enjoyed as the all-powerful, all-knowing figure of paternal authority (in *Green Grass*,

Robinson Crusoe explains how difficult it has been "as a civilized white man" to not have "someone of color around whom I could educate and protect" (294)). And if the Native fits into the white world in some ways, white society believes he should conform in every way--and quit demanding hunting rights, for instance--becoming simply "red" white men.

Settler society does not respect the real differences of the Native while acknowledging his similarities, but instead demands that the Native choose between being either completely "other" and serving as a sacrificial victim, or becoming completely assimilated by denying his own identity. Sifton, for example, insists that "'you guys aren't real Indians . . . you drive cars, watch television, go to hockey games . . . . You're a university professor [Eli]. . . . a big city boy. Like me'" (141-42). He makes his comparisons only on the most superficial level: if Eli is not a traditional Indian--ie. wandering around in full costume--then he must be white. Whether through stereotyping or assimilation, the real Native disappears, and so no longer poses a threat to the white world. The object is destroyed to preserve the symbol because without the created Indian the white man has nowhere to project his own savage nature.[3]

Continual exposure to the ideology of the inferior Native and the superior white undermines the Native's confidence in his own identity, possibly leading him to deny his culture. Attempting to assimilate into the white world, he may model himself after its heroes, trying to become exactly like them. Such mimesis motivates Lionel's childhood desire to be John Wayne, "Not the actor, but the character. Not the man, but the hero. . . . The John Wayne who saved stagecoaches and wagon trains from Indian attacks" (241). Lionel rejects his own culture in favor of the oppressor's, choosing as his role model an actor famed for playing characters glorified for slaughtering Indians. His illusions are shattered when his genuine John Wayne ring breaks (242), warning him that his dream can never be fulfilled and exposing its cheapness. Charlie, Eli, and Portland are also "'mimic men'" (Horne 268). Charlie, who mimics settler consumerism (Horne 268),

represents Duplessis in the case against his own people because "'some of us should'" make money off the dam. He has no delusions, and knows he was hired "because he was Blackfoot and Eli was Blackfoot and the combination played well in the newspapers" (King, *GG* 116). When the dam fails the case is closed, and Charlie is out of a job. Eli "describes himself in terms of a 'wannabe' white when he compares himself to Thoreau and to Grey Owl, who is a white, 'wannabe' Indian" (Horne 268). He stays away from the reserve for over twenty years (King, *GG* 344), losing touch with his past and his people, and thereby loses a part of himself: "Each year was easier. Each year laid more space between who he had become and who he had been. Until he could no longer measure the distance in miles (287). Portland "denies his identity and culture to 'progress' in settler culture. He not only emulates settler values but also physically transforms himself to comply with settler expectations and stereotypes" (Horne 269). In his desire to fulfill settler expectations, each of these Native men renounces his identity and culture.

Although the "mimic men's" desire to be white is negative, Dee Horne maintains that much of the mimesis in *Green Grass* is in fact subversive. Arguing against Bhabha's theory of mimesis as a "destructive form of hybridity" (257), she explains that by using "mimicry to satiric effect" King subverts settler culture (258):

> King attacks the cultural icons of patriarchal settler society. He critiques its materialism and capitalism, and he illustrates the four ideological pillars--Christianity, progress/technology, stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, and history--that settler society attempts to impose on First Nations to transform them into mimics. . . . He uses satire to mock these ideological pillars, and, in critiquing them, he reveals them to be fraudulent and destructive. (259)

The use of subversive mimicry conforms to Kristeva's advice to reform society from within: she critiques "the call to escape from the symbolic order into another space,"

promoting instead "a constant reintroduction of heterogeneity into linguistic and social structures--a constant remembering and reassertion of difference, which produces conflict and change" (Weir 172).

Native men have much to learn about embracing the other while retaining their own identity from Native women, who successfully integrate elements of white culture into their own. Camelot incorporates traditional Native foods into white recipes, substituting elk meat for artichoke for instance, with tasty results, much to Lionel's amazement (81). Her daughter, Latisha, "manipulates settler stereotypes as an advertising ploy by calling her restaurant the Dead Dog Café. Preying on settler expectations and perceptions of First Nations as 'savages,' she disguises hamburger as 'dog meat'" (Horne 269). Alberta Frank lives in the white world, teaching history, which she "re-presents from a First Nations perspective" unlike Eli, "who teaches English and settler canonical texts" (Horne 269). In contrast to Eli, Charlie, and Lionel, Alberta does not sacrifice her culture for her career, but journeys home to the reserve to visit relatives and attend ceremonies such as the Sun Dance. Norma, who "values her First Nations culture and her relations" (Horne 269), is a cultural guardian. Like the old Indians and Coyote, Norma has "a real strong idea about how the world should look" (342), and she constantly pressures the males not to abandon their heritage. According to Dee Horne, these "strong, self-possessed women . . . not only refuse to assimilate but also subvert settler culture" (269); they embrace the other, taking what they want from it, while retaining a distinct identity. The men, on the other hand, try to imitate the colonizer, a project doomed to failure since, as Bhabha explains, "settlers perceive natives as '*the same but not quite . . . the same but not white*'" (Horne 257; emphasis in text)--the Native can never become enough like the model to be considered anything but a poor imitation. These women, along with "the four male/female Indian tricksters, redeem the mimic men. They teach the men to value who they are and to reject mimicry/assimilation" (Horne

269-70). As unlikely as it may seem, the women's strength could result from their double marginalization: as Native and female, they are so far below the notice of the patriarchal gaze that they are virtually free to do as they please.

According to Allen, "nurturing, pacifist, and passive males (as defined by western minds) and self-defining, assertive, decisive women" are far from unusual in the Native community. She maintains in fact, that "[i]n many tribes, the nurturing male constitutes the ideal adult model for boys while the decisive, self-directing female is the ideal model to which girls aspire" (2). A large part of the Native male's identity crisis may stem from abandoning his "feminine" role in a gynocratic culture in order to conform to the patriarchal system of settler society. In an interview about his earlier novel, *Medicine River*, King concurs with Constance Rooke's assertion that his "males are moving towards female strengths, and females towards male strengths" (King, Interview 67). Given the uncertainty of their roles in the new society evolving out of interaction with the white world, the feminization of the Native male in King's work is positive, an embrace of a cultural strength which was nearly lost because of patriarchal influence.[4] Eli, for example, is finally able to return to the reserve after the "maternal" experience of nursing his wife through a long illness.

Allen's "tribal gynocratic" culture--"woman-centered" and communally oriented (2)--bears a striking resemblance to the non-sacrificial society Kristeva hopes we can one day achieve ("Women's Time" 34): in it, "a multitude of personality and character types can function positively within the social order because the systems are focused on social responsibility rather than on privilege and on the realities of the human constitution rather than on denial-based social fictions to which human beings are compelled to conform by powerful individuals within the society" (Allen 3). Modern Natives might want to rediscover this lifestyle, while whites could use it as the model for a society based on mutual respect rather than sacrifice, allowing us the possibility of living together in peace.

One sign of the Native identity crisis is the decay of rituals and ceremonies which bind their community together. We are told, for example, about the gradual erosion of the Sun Dance: "When [Eli] was a child, the teepees had stood six or seven deep. Now the circle was only two or three deep" (375). "When the religious framework of a society starts to totter," Girard explains, "the whole cultural foundation of the society is put in jeopardy. The institutions lose their vitality; the protective facade of the society gives way; social values are rapidly eroded, and the whole cultural structure seems on the verge of collapse" (49). Operation of the dam would further endanger the Sun Dance by preventing spring floods: "No flood. No nutrients. No cottonwoods. . . . And if the cottonwoods die," there will be no Sun Dance tree (King, *GG* 376).

By allowing Duplessis to build the dam on Native land, the government violates its treaty promises, promises which even the white men realize it "'never intended to keep'" (138). Sifton, the man in charge of the dam, acknowledges that the government signed the treaties in bad faith, hoping to take advantage of the Natives: he tells Eli that they "'only made them for convenience,'" not believing "'that there would still be Indians kicking around in the twentieth century'" (141). Lionel's boss, Bill Bursum, thinks, "As long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn't mean anything. . . . Treaties were hardly sacred documents. They were contracts, and no one signed a contract for eternity. No one" (267).

"[T]he beauty of dams," Sifton tells Eli, is that "they don't have politics" (111). Only politics, however, can explain why the dam was built on "Indian land" on a site not recommended in a provincial report (111), and despite "[e]nvironmental concerns . . . [q]uestions about possible fault lines that ran under the dam . . . [and] Native land claims that had been in the courts for over fifty years" (118). The government's decision is hardly surprising, however, given the colonial tendency to regard Native territory as unoccupied: the Australian High Court only recently ruled that the "doctrine of *terra*

nullius, which had been used for two centuries in British and Australian law to deny Native land claims, was . . . untenable [because] the land was indeed not empty at the moment of 'settlement'" (Lawson 25). Colonial powers have much invested in this perception since, as Alan Lawson points out, "[e]mpty land can be settled, but occupied land can only be invaded" (25). Denying the Native's very existence allows the settler to brush them aside in the name of progress. Despite treaties which cede specific areas to the Native, major developments, like dams, on Native lands show that governments still regard Native territory as unoccupied and therefore ripe for development.[5] The government can treat Natives in this fashion with little fear of political fall-out since society as a whole does not relate to the plight of the Natives and so does not sympathize with their cause. Society's view of the Native as inferior "other" makes him/her sacrificeable.

The government in *Green Grass* misreads the situation, however, when it assumes that these Natives will submissively accept its decision: they have learned from bitter experience not to trust the government, and reject the sacrificial role assigned to them by colonial society. When the Band council meets to discuss how they will spend the projected two million dollar windfall from the operation of the dam, for instance, Homer "had to give up, he was laughing so hard. Someone suggested that they rename the dam the Grand Goose or the Golden Goose because of the promised fortune and because, as Sam Belly put it, that's about all Indians ever got from the government, a goose" (117). Eli doubts his tribe will fare any better with the Grand Baleen Dam than the Cree in Quebec did with a similar project (376). Eli, who has lived in the white world, understands how the system works, and is not afraid to challenge it. He turns the legal system, which is normally a tool of colonial oppression, against the oppressor by taking Duplessis to court and temporarily preventing them from operating the dam.

If the treatment Lionel receives in America is any indication, however, there is little reason for the Natives to expect a final ruling in their favor: after being released from jail, Lionel is immediately thrown back in for not paying his hotel bill (63), even though he could not do so because he was incarcerated.[6] In the case of *Stands Alone* vs. *Duplessis*, the legal system appears to be genuinely concerned with providing justice for the Natives when it issues temporary injunctions preventing the dam from operating, but in reality it resolves nothing. The judicial process offers only a delay, not a solution: "The case was ten years old," and Charlie figures that "the way things were going, it would be in the courts for another ten years" (116); Eli acknowledges that "after all the years of arguments and threats and injunctions, he had won very little. . . . [A]t some point in the future, Eli had no doubt that they would find a way to maneuver around him" (260). Given the questionable history behind the government's decision to locate the dam on Native land, the court cannot justifiably rule in favor of Duplessis. Yet, it hesitates to rule against them, perhaps because those who enforce the law--predominantly white males--generally belong to the same sector of society as those in government and big business, and so share the same agenda: keeping those with power in power. Instead of a quest for justice, this case is an exercise in evasion: Duplessis drags it out, knowing that they can outspend and probably out-wait Eli. Whereas an immediate ruling against Eli could antagonize the Band into violent opposition, if the case goes on for long enough, the Natives may come to accept the dam.

Although there is little actual violence in *Green Grass*, King reveals the potential for violence fermenting just below the surface. Lionel's near experience with Wounded Knee serves as a reminder that when Natives fight peacefully for long enough without seeing any results, they will use physical force to get their point across, and fights over photos at the Sun Dance show that this community will resort to violence when its traditions are threatened and its wishes ignored (140, 386).[7] As well, violence in the

novel sometimes takes a non-physical form. In her study on violence against women, Martha Reineke turns to Luce Irigaray's theory of violent paralysis, a concept which surely applies equally well to Natives: "Any exploration of violence against [Natives] that will be adequate to the phenomenon must account not only for physical incidents of violence, but also for *paralysis*, which immobilizes [Natives] in cultural bonds not of their own making . . ." (2; emphasis in text). This certainly describes Lionel's life in limbo: he is turning forty and although he plans to attend university every fall, he has been working his "temporary" job at Bursum's entertainment shop for over eight years (82). Like Lionel, Eli, Charlie, and Portland also lead paralyzed lives. Eli refers to himself as the "Indian who couldn't go home" (286), putting off the second trip to the Sun Dance that he promises his wife until it is too late, and both she and his mother are dead. Despite Charlie's posturing, his career as a lawyer cannot be much more satisfying than Lionel's job selling televisions: after selling out his people to represent Duplessis, he loses his job when the case is over. Portland remains trapped in the past, dreaming of the glory days when he played the white man's Indian in Hollywood, and, after his wife's death, he is uninterested in, or incapable of, living in the real world. Problems with communication also provide examples of violent paralysis. Lionel cannot make himself heard when he tries to clear up the mistaken stories that have shaped his life: he has been plagued by rumours of his non-existent heart condition since he was eight years old (35-37), and after an unexpected encounter with members of the American Indian Movement, he is persecuted as one of their leaders (60, 64). As a lawyer, Charlie belongs to a profession famous for its ability to twist language around so it means something it should not, or, like the treaties, nothing at all.

King's humour functions as an alternative to physical violence. Atwood describes how his stories

> ambush the reader. They get the knife in, not by whacking you over the head with their own moral righteousness, but by being funny. Humour can be aggressive and oppressive, as in keep-'em-in-their-place sexist and racist jokes. But it can also be a subversive weapon, as it has been for people who find themselves in a fairly tight spot without other, more physical, weapons. ("Double-Bladed Knife" 244)

The substitution of humour for violence is part of the Native story tradition, Alan Velie explains, since "'in the fight against evil,'" trickster figures such as Coyote use "'wit rather than violence'" (qtd. in Donaldson, 41). King maintains that his fiction is primarily intended for a Native audience (Interview 73), and his subversive use of humour offers them an alternative to physical violence for dealing with their hostilities--a necessary alternative when one considers how often Natives become victims of any violence they instigate in the hope of improving their condition.[8]

In *Green Grass*, King uses different types of humour. Lionel's mishaps cause us to laugh with him, to sympathize with the positions he finds himself in. Laughter directed towards white society, on the other hand, is harsh; it relies on ridicule rather than shared identification, distancing the reader from the object. White men are usually portrayed as fools: Dr. J. Hovaugh, "Joseph God Almighty Hovaugh himself" (220), a seemingly paranoid psychiatrist, watches in dismay as the old Indians escape his control time and again, wreaking havoc on the white world (415); George Morningstar is a "wannabe Indian" who thinks he can do anything despite failing at everything he tries (eg 338); Bill Bursum, the sleazy owner of the local TV shop, is a joke to the Natives and his other employees; and Sifton shows up at Eli's cabin every day for seven years asking exactly the same questions even though he already knows what the answers will be (111; 141). King challenges patriarchal authority when he ridicules white males since laughter aimed at the oppressor exposes the precarious nature of his dominance (Barreca 58), placing the

underdog "in the position of power" (Barreca 56). Both types of humour in this novel--laughing at and laughing with--align the white reader with the Native perspective, forcing me to think critically about the power structure of which I am a part. Humour provides a means of subverting white power, of exposing Native issues in such a way that the white audience remains receptive to the message--something we might not do when confronted with anger or outright criticism. Expressing anger can have constructive results but, as Deirdre Lashgari points out, it also runs the risk of alienating and shutting down the people you are trying to reach, making it impossible for them to hear your concerns (9). Alan Velie explains the subversive potential for "trickster" novels like *Green Grass* to create empathy in a white audience: "'by reading the narrative of the trickster, told by the trickster . . . [readers] are manipulated into being tricksters who will share [the characters'] outrage at the current state of things and will join them in'" their battle (qtd. in Donaldson 40; second parentheses in text).

With irreverent humour, King rewrites biblical legends and colonial literature, allowing the Native to triumph over the white. Christianity is hit hard: GOD is a dream dog who gets his name reversed; Adam becomes Ahdamn, a not-too-bright subordinate to his Native companion, Evening; Noah is an old lecher running around on an arc full of poop; and Jesus, "Young Man Walking on Water," acts like a spoiled child, throwing a tantrum when nature refuses to obey his commands. Four Indian spirit women each reject a biblical narrative because there is no place for her in that story: First Woman leaves the Garden of Eden to escape the selfish authoritarian GOD who refuses to share his food (69); Changing Woman leaves Noah because, like First Woman, she refuses to obey a tyrant (148); Thought Woman resists A.A. Gabriel, Heavenly Host when he tries to make her into the Virgin Mary (271); and Old Woman swims away from Young Man when he takes the credit after she saves his disciples, convincing them that he must have been responsible since she is just a woman who "sings songs to waves" (351), a non-

authoritarian figure who communes with nature rather than attempting to conquer it as he does. By rewriting biblical narratives, King, a "colonized writer," transforms "mimicry into a *partial* repetition to critique and delegitimize the 'original' settlers and discourse and . . . re-present . . . the settlers and their discourse" (Horne 255-56; emphasis in text).

Colonizing tales are rewritten in a similar vein. The spirit women turn the settler's myths against him and triumph over him by shunning the conventional role of sidekick and adopting the personas of cultural and literary characters with agency. First Woman dons a black mask and becomes the Lone Ranger with Ahdamn as her Indian friend Tonto (71). *Moby Dick's* Captain Ahab is blood-thirsty, eager to kill "things that are useful or things we don't like" such as "blackwhalesbian[s]." He maintains that they are pursuing "Moby-Dick, the great male white whale," when it is actually "Moby-Jane, the Great Black [Female] Whale" (196). Ishmael insists that Changing Woman must be Queequeg because "this book has a Queequeg in it, and this story is supposed to have a Queequeg in it, but I've looked all over the ship and there aren't any Queequegs" (195). She refuses this script however, adopting Ishmael's name instead. Similarly, Nathaniel--"Nasty to his friends"--tries to make Old Woman play the role of his friend Chingachgook in *The Last of the Mohicans* because "Chingachgook is an Indian. You're an Indian. Case Closed" (392). Old Woman also refuses her assigned role, preferring to become Hawkeye. Bored with Robinson Crusoe's compulsion to categorize everything as good or bad, Thought Woman resists his attempts to make her his man Friday, and takes on Crusoe's identity when she leaves his island (295; 324). Each Woman winds up at Fort Marion, where the US army imprisoned Natives "considered to be dangerous" (18), but her new identity gains her freedom (418).

One of the old Indians' finest achievements is altering existing Westerns so the Natives win the battles instead of the cowboys. Bursum is outraged when he plays his favorite Western on a display of televisions set up in the shape of North America and sees

the Indians defeating John Wayne and the soldiers. In their attempt to fix up the world, King and the old Indians rewrite the founding myths of white society from an irreverent perspective, granting Natives the agency which white culture denied them. "Through the cultural production of *Green Grass, Running Water* and its contestatory intertextuality, Thomas King effects . . . a subversive re-ordering of relations in the dominant fields of imperialist, capitalist and masculinist power" (Donaldson 40).

The old Indians are aided in their quest by Coyote, a traditional Native trickster figure who combines contradictory traits--s/he is simultaneously wise and foolish, a creative force, and one of destruction. S/he causes the dam to burst (409), a much-needed miracle which protects the Natives as the law could not since, as Charlie points out, no matter how the court rules "'the dam is there. The lake is there. You can't just make them go away'" (117). The old Indians and Coyote can and do "just make them go away," however, but the community pays a price since Eli drowns when the dam bursts. Sacrifice is intended to appease the gods, and although the old Indians and Coyote are laughing rather than angry gods, they still demand blood for their services: they are with Eli when the dam bursts and could have saved him, but instead let him drown (408). Eli's death can be directly attributed to the government's irresponsibility--after all, they dismissed geologists' warnings "about possible fault lines that ran under the dam" (118)--greatly increasing the public impact of the dam's failure. By literally sacrificing Eli, the gods expose the sacrificial nature of the society with which he has been struggling, opening up the possibility that the white world will realize they have been sacrificing Natives all along. Having destroyed the dam, an important symbol of white oppression, the old Indians return to the asylum, happy to have "fixed up part of the world," but admitting that "part of it got messed up, too" (427).

Eli satisfies Girard's concept of the sacrificial victim as someone who "belong[s] both to the inside and the outside of the community" (272). He is born and raised on the

reserve and his family is there, but he lives in Toronto for many years, visiting only once. When he finally returns, Eli literally sets himself apart from the community by moving into his mother's old cabin, the only home below the dam. Although he is reintegrating, Eli spends much of his time alone. His participation in the Sun Dance confirms his connection with the Band; at the same time, however, it reinforces the importance of his outsider status, for if Eli had stayed at the Dance he would not have been washed away in the flood. The ceremonies Eli attends at the Sun Dance can be read as ritual preparation for his sacrifice: after painting his face and performing the traditional dances (364; 388), he is ready for death.

In his role as saviour, Eli parallels the biblical Noah. Indeed, Sifton warns Eli that when the floodgates to the dam open, his "house is going to turn into an arc" (142). Donaldson describes Eli as "a First Nations Noah who rewrites the biblical story by blocking the water rather than sailing it" (39). He is an inverted Noah chosen to save his people by drowning in a flood instead of surviving it while everyone else drowns. Although she does not explore the sacrificial overtones of Eli's death which I find so compelling, Donaldson points to the sacrificial significance of the flood when she explains that it "conjures emancipation rather than cataclysm . . . for it enables the Blackfoot to resist governmental control of their lives and to reclaim their homeland" (39). When he dies in the fight to save his people, Eli shows us that instead of fulfilling the role of the victim sacrificed for white society's benefit, the sacrificial Native can be transformed into a sacred empowering force for his people, serving as an antidote to the sacrificial victimization they have suffered. This is not a positive alternative, but a desperate final resort.

King's re-presentation of the story of Noah, impious though it may be, reminds us that the flood is God's chosen method of washing away the sins of humanity in order to allow them a fresh start. This flood does not wash away only the dam, but since the three

cars that go with it, "a Nissan, a Pinto, and a Carmen Ghia" represent "the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María," the flood "suggest[s] a washing away of Columbus's colonial heritage" (Donaldson 40). Of course the Natives still have to deal with and adapt to the white world, but they may now finally have the agency to reject the aspects of white life which will harm rather than help them. As Eli's conversation with Sifton makes clear, Natives do not intend to live exactly as they did one hundred years ago, but want the freedom to choose the lifestyle they live now rather than have it dictated to them by settler society: when Sifton claims that Eli's family are "'[n]ot exactly traditionalists,'" Eli points out, "'It's not exactly the nineteenth century, either'" (141). With the dam gone, the Band has a greater chance of integrating their culture and traditions with their present reality, including the white presence.

Part of Coyote's solution for fixing up the world includes granting Alberta's wish to become pregnant. S/he also takes credit for the conception of Christ (416), implying that Alberta's baby could be a future saviour for her people. As well as providing hope in the Christian context, Alberta's pregnancy is positive from a Kristevean perspective:

> Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech. . . . The arrival of the child . . . leads the mother into the labyrinths of an experience that, without the child, she would only rarely encounter: love for an other. (Kristeva, "Women's Time" 31)

Pregnancy literally embodies the concept--which Kristeva sees as our only hope for a harmonious society (*Strangers* 192)--of accepting the "other" within oneself.

Native literature also provides a means for white society to learn to embrace the "other" since "the First Nations writer deconstructs Natives as other/objects and reconstructs them as subjects" (Horne 256). *Green Grass, Running Water* allows the

white reader to take in the Native "other" by identifying with Native characters and sharing the Native experience. Each of the novel's four sections begins with a Cherokee inscription for which King provides no translation, insider information which leaves whites on the outside, the position so often occupied by the Native.[9] King models his novel on the Native oral tradition, causing the reader to suspend linear, chronological expectations in favor of Native cyclical time, and to accept the fantastic and non-logical. With *Green Grass*, King brilliantly fulfills Horne's theory that by "imposing the language of the dominant culture on the colonized, the settler provides the colonized with the means to subvert . . . the construction of the native as other--from within the discourse of the dominant culture" (255). Perhaps associational literature, with its emphasis on harmony and community, offers us a model for Kristeva's "democracy of the multiple" ("Cultural Strangeness" 43).

Green Grass, Running Water repeatedly stresses that it is "[b]est not to make [mistakes] with stories" (14), and that the only way to fix one that has gone wrong is to start again from the beginning (eg 100, 226). This is also true of the dam: for the Natives it is a mistake which threatens their existence, and must be destroyed so they can start over, hopefully getting things right this time. Eli loses his life in his fight against the dam, but its destruction gives his people greater hope for the future. When the flood waters recede, his family digs through the mud to retrieve the porch post on which all of them, including Eli, had carved their names, and begin rebuilding the family cabin, constructing their future on the foundation of the past (422). When Lionel suggests that he might like to live in the new cabin Norma replies "'It's my turn. Your turn will come soon enough'" (423), and when Charlie says he is going to Los Angeles, she tells him that he will be back. Despite the large number of Natives who have left the reserve looking for a different life, Norma has faith that these men will remain a part of the community, carrying on family and tribal traditions. Lionel is closer to his family and community than

he has been for years, and Charlie is finally going to see his father, reestablishing his ties with his people (421). It seems as if the flood of Natives abandoning their roots may have been stemmed. Since Alberta has managed to adopt the best of both worlds, it would be fitting if her child were to lead her people into the future, adapting to the reality of the white world while retaining a distinct Native identity.

Chapter 3: "This Foreign Country, This Alien Body, This Other Suffering"

> "You draw away the knife" (he did this with the utmost care) "and, holding between your fingers the detached end of the strip of skin, you pull outwards and away." (In his right hand he held a torn vegetable ribbon, the green filaments hanging down towards his palm.)
>
> "Now the flesh is open to the air. Now the patient knows that the procedure is one of absence, that he will never recover the loss. And all the time you must tell yourself: I am not part of this foreign country, this alien body, this other suffering. It is he, the patient, who has brought this on himself. I am but a labourer. I am doing my job. And I must do it well."
>
> --*News from a Foreign Country Came*

News from a Foreign Country Came is Alberto Manguel's story of a family torn apart by a father's violence. This violence is not that of the criminal, but of the police: Antoine Berence has made a career out of torturing perceived enemies of the state. Although they are sanctified by law, his actions are those of the terrorist, performed secretly--the governments involved deny any responsibility for or knowledge of the events which are carried out under their command. Berence begins working for the French military in Algeria, where "'[s]ome of the best methods of torture'" were perfected (Manguel 81). After Algeria gains its independence, the Captain, acting on behalf of the French government, takes his skills to Argentina and trains its soldiers in his art. When his wife, Marianne, accidentally witnesses one of his lessons, she is destroyed by the knowledge that the man she knows as a loving, compassionate husband and father is capable of such great evil. The Berence family retires to a coastal town in Quebec, but cannot escape the shadow of Antoine's violence. A small group of Argentine "terrorists" follows them there, seeking vengeance for the atrocities committed against their families, and blows up the family home, killing Marianne. As well as bringing her own suffering to an end, Marianne's death has a redemptive quality since it saves their daughter from the violent

world of her father. The Captain, who escapes the explosion, tells Ana about the things he has done which have led to her mother's death. She does what her mother could not, and leaves him.

Although Manguel sets his novel in small-town Quebec, with extended flashbacks to Algiers, Paris, and Buenos Aires, Argentina during the 1970s provides the political context for *News*. At this time, the "repressive military government" was responsible for the death or disappearance of approximately 30 000 individuals. No trial was held to determine the guilt or innocence of those believed to be enemies of the state; instead, the military dealt with suspected "leftists" by whatever means they deemed necessary, including "pushing political prisoners to their death from planes" ("Military Man"). If it were acting justly, a government would prosecute traitors openly, but this regime went (and still goes) to great lengths to keep its activities secret: in 1997 a "former Argentine Navy captain" who discussed the "atrocities" committed by the military had his face slashed by attackers who "warned him to stop speaking with journalists about [these] crimes" ("Military Man"). In *News*, Manguel describes the women who went to the police every day desperately seeking information about missing husbands and children. Despite eyewitness claims to the contrary, the police deny their involvement in the disappearances and claim to know nothing about the "disappeared": "'They tell you your children don't have names. They tell you your children don't exist, that they have vanished. They want to force you to miscarry your sons and your daughters, to believe they were never born alive, to think of them as bloodstains on a carpet . . . . They call your children abortions, they make your children unborn,'" one woman cries (203).

In Argentina at this time, the law was not about justice, but about oppression. Looking for an example of those who do violence to others, Berence, a government man, comes up with the police (73). In our society the criminal seems a more likely choice, but in Berence's world the police are not keepers of the peace, but perpetrators of violence.

The government creates laws which allow it to destroy its enemies, to eliminate anyone who dares to question its methods. Berence's maid, Rebecca, recalls the police killing most of her family: "'My [eight-year old] nephew. Both my brothers. My sister-in-law. My brother-in-law. My father'"; in Argentina "the police don't need reasons" to do this (59). Her friend Juan bears scars inflicted by the military, and tells of others also tortured or killed by a man carrying out government orders (68). When it is impossible to distinguish between acts of law and acts of terrorism, between the policeman and the terrorist, between "the pure and the impure," René Girard explains, "contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community" (49). Argentina is overwhelmed by violence as the government becomes increasingly vicious in its attempts to curb revolt, and the rebels react more and more violently to the atrocities committed against them.

Because terrorism carried out by the police and the military is sanctioned by Argentine law, their victims have nowhere to turn for help. International organizations which should provide protection do not appear in the novel. In fact, instead of opposing what is happening, the government of France--a "highly civilized" nation--supports the Argentine government because of their own political interests in the region. While training the Argentine military in methods of torture, Berence acts "'in an advisory capacity'" for the French embassy in Argentina (171). The Captain is described as a "man who took his colonialism seriously" (20), and he thinks of himself as the Knight in Dürer's *Knight, Death, and the Devil*: "the eternal horseman fighting a king's war on foreign ground, risking everyman's death and everyman's damnation" (22). His actions are not just a personal evil, but part of the larger patriarchal pattern of colonization, and using the logic of the colonizer, Berence describes himself and his comrades as "explorers down the Orinoco, Livingstone in Africa, Hatteras at the North Pole . . . [going] to give these utopias a place . . . trying once again to bring a sense of order into the disorder" (232-33). He admits however, that colonization does not always achieve this goal, when he

speaks of Columbus's men who "razed [the] New World to the ground, feeding children to dogs, quartering the Inca king, raping the women" (234). The belief in white European supremacy which inscribes our patriarchal system allows men like Berence to see the natives of conquered lands not as human beings who deserve equal rights, but as "'heathens'": "In the French imagination," Marianne explains, the Arabs "were like dragons or elves" (122).

As is typical of a patriarchal/colonial society, those in charge never seem to hear the voice of the "other." As a young girl Marianne notices that men never listen to women: "When I or . . . Mamma ventures to say something, everyone carries on talking, doing whatever it is they were doing before, as if my voice were nonexistent, a ghost of a voice, something that the living, the men, cannot sense" (101). She is not surprised when the Arabs call for violence because the French "won't hear, they never hear. Show them. Force them. Pluck out their eyes. Rub their eyes on the banners. Teach them to see," the Arabs cry (105). When the Argentine rebels cannot make their voices heard by either their own government or an international agency with the power to help them, they resort to physical statements, countering violence with violence.

By training men like Berence to become torturers, the French military has created monsters which it no longer needs when Algeria gains its independence, but who cannot come home. In France there is no legitimate outlet for the violence which these men have been channeling into acts of torture, so they pose a threat to the rest of society. They are also a potential source of embarrassment since the government does not want its citizens to know about the atrocities its military commits abroad. It does, however, allow and perhaps even encourage such barbarity in the colonies, as a means of controlling the colonized, so Berence and his associates are "left with taking [their] sense of order elsewhere, trying out the systems somewhere else" (232). By sending men like Berence to Argentina, the French government benefits not only by ensuring that their political

allies remain in power, but also by ridding themselves of a threat to their society and eliminating the possibility that their secrets could be exposed.

Berence advises his trainees that when they torture, they must tell themselves that "I am not part of this foreign country, this alien body, this other suffering" (209), affirming Kristeva's position that seeing the other as alien/foreigner allows for violence against them (Weir 150). As a master torturer, Berence understands the necessity of dehumanizing the victim in order to make torture more palatable to those who perform it, to help them avoid the guilt they should feel for inflicting pain on another human being. He teaches his underlings to do this by using a stalk of celery to demonstrate the techniques of torture, allowing them to view their victims as vegetables rather than people: "'What I have here, this piece of vegetable life, is essentially identical to your patients. It has skin, it has flesh, and its inner leaves can be seen to correspond to internal organs and bones" (208). The Captain presents torture in a favorable guise by calling the victim a "patient" so that it seems as if the incursions into the flesh are beneficial, and by describing torture as a carefully executed skating "performance" (207), turning a horrifying reality into mere entertainment. Such tactics are necessary because if the torturer relates to the victim or his pain, if he recognizes how similar he himself is to the victim and imagines himself in the victim's position, he may be incapable of committing such acts. Berence warns his students that if they cannot "'guard'" themselves against the "'knowledge of pain in others,'" it could destroy them (208).

In his speech, Berence dismembers the body, explaining that while drowning a person, one must think of the head, "'not the patient's entire body, only the head, a creature unto itself.'" The torturer does the victim a favor by "'returning the head . . . to the water. It is, if you will, an act of repatriation'" (209). As well, Berence claims that the victim alone is responsible for the fate he suffers: "It is he, the patient, who has brought this on himself" (209). He further insists that if you hold someone's head in a

allies remain in power, but also by ridding themselves of a threat to their society and eliminating the possibility that their secrets could be exposed.

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bucket of water and "death occurs, it is always due to the patient's stubbornness . . . . 'To drown' must not, in your vocabulary, be a transitive verb. You must repeat to yourself: no one ever drowns. People choose to stop living. Drowning is a suspension of the will'" (209). Marianne is so traumatized by overhearing this lesson that she cannot comfort Ana when Josie drowns, but instead repeats over and over again, "No one ever drowns, no one ever drowns, no one ever drowns" (15).

To help us understand why a government which is technically a democracy (191) resorts to the very non-democratic practice of torturing its own citizens, we can turn to Kristeva's theories on violence and the sacrificial society. Kristeva "assists us in comprehending how rage, murder, and mutilation figure in . . . signifying practices" (Reineke 47) by warning us that in a sacrificial society "[s]ubjects position themselves . . . by means of brutal assertions of presence that violate others" (Reineke 49). In Argentina, the ruling regime brutally asserts its dominance over its opponents so that it will not lose its position of authority. Perceiving that the rebels "pose a radical threat to their continued existence," those in power "exchange angry and fearful words for more powerful weapons of response, engaging in protracted acts of violence" (Reineke 32).

By defying the government, by challenging its rules and threatening its authority, the rebels reveal that the law of the Father is not as firmly established as it needs to be in order to maintain the existing Argentine social structure, and so must be reinscribed. To do this, the government uses torture to reenact the process by which society was originally established. Working with Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach to subject formation, Reineke explains that people believe "if they kill, they create community" because, "in the throes of formative subjectivity, humans . . . [cross] into and out of [soma]," destroying their bond with the Mother in order "to create social space" (Reineke 90). It makes sense then, that a "community under threat engage[s] in boundary-building ventures based on those that first brought it into existence as a social order" (Reineke

68), returning to the body to repress the drives and desires of the semiotic--the power of the Mother--in favor of the authority of the Father. Subjects enter the realm of the Symbolic, the world of the Father, of law and order, of rules and regulations, by "*viscerally* extract[ing] themselves from" the all-engulfing Mother. This "first" lesson "in violence teach[es] them that, should they ever find themselves back at the very threshold of meaning because of life-threatening conflict, if they hold close to the flesh of a victim and probe it, they will be able to summon the very powers of life itself from within its somatic depths" (Reineke 89; emphasis in text). The ritual of torture, a literal "crossing into and out of" soma, attempts to reenact the subject's initiation into the Symbolic in order to reestablish boundaries which are currently under threat. "Whenever order is challenged and they wish to resecure their boundaries against threat, [the authorities] turn to [the] body to reinscribe, reflect on, and commit to memory subject-creating forces . . . that first secured them in the world" (Reineke 68). The Argentine government tortures its enemies not only to make them conform, but also because it hopes to reestablish its authority so fully that no one will dare to challenge it again.

In Berence's eyes, "nothing is less violent than torture, nothing more orderly, detached, meticulous, because torture is a function of duty, it verges on boredom, but sometimes necessary boredom, . . . necessary for the order of life to continue" (232). He carefully distinguishes between this and the "unwarranted violence" which results in chaos, explaining to Ana that "I have always loathed violence, because it makes me feel sick with a nausea greater than anything else I have ever felt . . . pure violence, unnecessary, resulting in nothing, serving no purpose" because it is not "at the service of order" (228-229). Marianne recalls her husband once telling her that whereas "'[w]ar follows a strategy, . . . the man who hits his wife in the face, the child who sets a dog on fire, the lunatic who places razor blades inside chocolate bars--they are as inhuman as anything in nature'" (128). Officially sanctioned torture, however, conducted analytically

rather than emotionally and as part of a larger plan to establish order, is, in Berence's opinion, warranted.

Berence never questions the ethics of the order being established, but carries out his duties like a good soldier: he recognizes that the Argentine rebels are better men than those in charge (233), yet continues to work for the latter, believing "we had to persevere, we had to try, teach the likes of Casares to think, to act with a course in mind, and yet we knew from the start there was but little hope" (234). The Captain is disturbed not by the "beating and raping and terrifying" these men carry out, but only because they do so "with no method, no purpose" (233). From the victim's perspective, however, it seems doubtful that senseless violence could be any more horrifying than the systematic violence perpetrated by the authorities in order to oppress him/her.

As Reineke shows us, Berence is correct in believing that torture can create order, especially in a patriarchal/colonial society with its sacrificial social contract which allows some to prosper at the expense of "others." This order, however, may not benefit society as much as men like the Captain expect it to, since the oppressed never contribute to their fullest potential. Even Berence is frustrated that they have taught the Algerians nothing "'[e]xcept to obey. We have taught them that obedience is good. No matter who is at the helm'" (124). He should not be surprised that those who are treated like slaves--beaten and bruised whenever they do not conform exactly to the wishes of those in power--do not exhibit mankind's nobler qualities, but simply do as they have been told. The best they have to offer will not be given in service to the oppressor, but used in secret against him.

For colonial outsiders like Berence, "otherness" is determined largely by race. For the Argentine government, however, the "other" differs only in its politics. Its sacrificial victims are chosen not because of race, gender, or class, but because of their political beliefs. Rebecca is a lower-class maid, and the police kill most of her family

(59), but Veronica, a university student whose family is wealthy enough to share the same neighbourhood as Perón (181), is not protected by her parents' higher status. The list of "disappeared" that Marianne hears about at a women's meeting includes a pregnant daughter, a member of the metal-workers' union, two doctors, young grandchildren, and a high school teacher (202). The only thing these people have in common is that each is regarded as a threat by the authorities.

Although he is capable of loving a few individuals, humanity as a whole terrifies and disgusts Berence: "visiting an asylum in Algiers, he had realized with revulsion that what terrified him was the swelling mass of bodies whose different, individual afflictions had become one, a singly mad monster." He recognizes in himself "the utter impossibility of loving a vast sea of humanity (28). His ability to see the "other" as "an unreal and ever-present group with no individual faces" (122) helps Berence to carry out the government's agenda.

Berence follows a code of conduct which, in his eyes--if not in those of his victims--cleanses his acts of their barbarity. Although it is irrelevant to the periwinkle how delicately he pries it from its shell, for instance, for Berence this is the difference between a "Gallic barbarian" and a "Christian" (69), between unseemly violence and culture. "*Would we eat them,*" he asks himself, "*if we knew they felt pain?*" (70; emphasis in text). The answer would seem to be yes, as long as he can use impeccable manners to absolve himself of guilt. For Berence, culture serves, as Girard explains religion does, to humanize "violence . . . transforming it into a transcendent and ever-present danger to be kept in check by the appropriate rites appropriately observed" (Girard 134). Berence instructs Clive that when dining, "your right hand pecks gently at the food, [while] your left hand, in true Christian fashion lies resting in your lap, oblivious of the world. Once it has served its purpose, it abandons its weapon and retires from strife. Watch, my dear Clive, and learn. There's a lesson" (69)--a lesson in using manners and rituals to disguise

violence as culture. The novel refutes this concept however, by revealing that Berence's behavior is no different than that which occurs in nature: although he advises Clive that the civilized man "pecks" at his food, a few pages earlier we had learned about a drowned man whose "face had been pecked by the gulls" (57), and years before Berence was sickened by the site of gulls swooping down to peck out the eyes of a trapped and dying kitten (129). It is deeply disturbing that for Berence, turning a blind eye to suffering--even when you are responsible for it--exemplifies Christianity. He is not alone in this, however; the French ambassador, for example, compliments Casares for "'bringing [Christian] order into this madness'" that is Argentina (189). Continuing a tradition which began with the earliest days of colonization, the oppressors (ab)use Christianity to justify the violence which furthers their political agenda.

Despite his apparent composure, Berence struggles to repress terrible memories, affirming Rebecca's belief that while the drowned are at peace, "'those who do the drowning . . . have no rest'" (61). When Clive questions him about Argentina, Berence thinks, "*I won't recall the past . . . . Your knowledgeable Antoine is sunk in an ink-black sea; I threw him away to find some rest. Your bloody business is your own. I've cut away. I remember nothing. Leave me in peace*" (66). Dante's seven circles of Hell are never far from Berence's thoughts (eg 71), and he tells Clive that they will "'both share the same circle of Hell . . . .You will be made into a knotted tree, groaning and spewing blood, and I'll be chased by black female mastiffs over your aching roots'" (73). Berence's hemorrhoids can be read as a physical manifestation of his inner corruption, a link which he himself establishes when he asks why he suffers with them, and must immediately repress the memory of a past torture (51). Ironically--given the inconceivable pain he has inflicted on others--Berence finds hemorrhoids unbearably painful. After an operation to remove them, painkillers allow him to "at last . . . master the daydreams" which haunt him (62). The language of torture slips into Berence's speech to Clive about dining rituals,

revealing that despite his ability to compartmentalize his life, his work contaminates his domestic world. When Berence's wife cleanses herself of his violence by giving up her life, he can no longer repress his memories, but feels compelled to confess them to his daughter who then rejects him. The final image of the novel is of Berence driving off alone in the night, haunted by the demons of his past (235).

Berence embodies the seemingly irreconcilable qualities of both good and evil. The man who vomits because he is so upset by the sight of gulls attacking a dying kitten is somehow capable of torturing other human beings to death, and then returning home to the role of loving husband and father. He performs his work with barely a twinge of conscience because, for him, his violence is purified by the fact that it is carried out under government orders: he is "'but a labourer'" doing a job, and "'must do it well'" (209). Berence remains, as he tells his pupils they must, a "'decent [man] after [the] task is over'" (207), so despite the evil he practices away from his family, he is loving and kind with them. He loves Marianne because she is pure and good, and capable of loving as he cannot (229): even with Ana he maintains a certain distance, Marianne notes, watching her "with the detachment of a cat" (195). Family provides a space for Berence to escape the evils he commits, and focus instead on what is good in himself. On the walk to church one day he thinks they make "*one of the paradigmatic images of civilization. The Family, on Its Way to Church*" (75; emphasis in text). As the head of the family, he sees himself in the role of protector: at a dinner party, Berence "wishe[s] he could reach over and hold [Marianne], so that she wouldn't appear so frightened. *As if she were surrounded by horrible shadows*. . . . He wanted to stand up, rise into the surrounding darkness, lift Marianne by the arms, and disappear" (33; emphasis in text). Sadly, however, it is his actions that have created her "horrible shadows" and her need for protection.

The aura of violence and corruption surrounding Berence threatens his family. He brings his *camarade* Monsieur Clive (27), a colleague from Algeria, into their home. Clive, who is associated with images of death and decay, frightens and disgusts Ana. He gives off a "strong sickening smell" (4) and saves his nail clippings in a small enamelled box (18). After disturbing Ana with a horrible description of tent caterpillars, Clive burns and then crushes them in front of her (5). When Clive offers his condolences for Josie's death, she feels "pity and revulsion--gratitude . . . and something akin to nausea" (48). More importantly, Berence brings the violence of Argentina into their Quebec home when the terrorists pursue him, seeking revenge for the tortures he conducted.

Ana recognizes that her world is under constant threat and resorts to a counting ritual for protection (eg 12, 42) because numbers are "magic" (11). She counts floor boards, for example, promising herself that if the number is even all threats will be banished: "*Juan will go away, Monsieur Clive will go away, and we all, Maman, Papa, Rebecca, and me, we'll take the car back to Quebec City.*" "*But . . . if the number is uneven, then I'll never see [Rebecca] again. She'll be gone . . . or she'll have died in a horrible accident. . . .* Ana began to count, *if the number is uneven I'll die*" (79; emphasis in text).

Not surprisingly, the person closest to Berence--his wife, Marianne--is most polluted by his violence. Years before she is killed by the terrorist bomb, Marianne is destroyed by her knowledge of Berence's activities. When she accidentally stumbles into one of his training sessions, she cannot convince herself, as the Captain does, that the political and legal context justify his actions; for her, his violence is unacceptable. She cannot forget the kind and caring man she has been married to for so many years, however, and so cannot stop herself from loving him: "I realized that I would go on loving him in spite of my eyes and my ears, in spite of myself" (210). Simultaneously

loving and hating Berence, Marianne cannot "sustain her identity in division," but is "pulled apart" and destroyed (Weir 183).

Since much of Marianne's identity comes from her role as Berence's wife, when she learns that he is a monster, she too becomes one, inscribing her husband's evils onto her own body, making it reflect his sins. She grows incredibly obese: "the fluttering and the whispering and the rustling sounds around me . . . gnaw their passageways deep inside me, making my skin rise in mounds like burrows, inhabiting me like the ghosts of small furry animals that breed and fight . . . bloating me . . . as they did that first night when I knew" (211). In her self-assigned purgatory, Marianne knits continuously. Although she "loathe[s] the lugubrious clicking of the needles" (162), it takes precedence even over her daughter: when Josie drowns, Marianne cannot comfort Ana because her arms are "protecting her knitting-nest" (14). Unable to reconcile her role as the mother of an innocent child with her role as the lover of a man responsible for such atrocities, Marianne turns her daughter away.

Ana sees her mother as a "large white [sea-]bird" (15), and Marianne is often described as a strange creature or beast: her "white round face narrowed, the shrunken eyes sank even deeper, like clam holes in the sand, and with a cry the whole mass shuddered forward" (15); she is a "large slow white form" (24), a "large and blind beast" (61). Blurring the boundary between human and beast, Marianne is the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite," Kristeva's abject (*Powers* 4). Making love to her, Berence sees Marianne's "face . . . bloated and pale like something left too long in water" (78)--she could be the corpse of one of his drowned. Despite this, or perhaps even excited by it, Berence continues to have sex with her although she no longer responds to him at all. Marianne's abjection is completed by her disfigurement in the explosion which kills her: "her face had been erased as if ripped off by a monstrous claw; there was nothing there except a gaping hollow" (85). She is so thoroughly destroyed by her husband's violence

that she is no longer a person or even a beast, but just a "gaping hollow," some form of non-existence.

Marianne reacts to the violence she experiences in the world by turning it inwards, destroying herself. Reineke explains that in Kristeva's work, the "subject . . . [who] responds to the threat of the abject with implosive violence is a melancholic (91). The melancholic rejects the Symbolic order in which she feels she does not have a place (Reineke 92), so when Marianne cannot come to terms with the atrocities her husband commits, she opts out of the system, realizing that she does not belong in the realm of the Father, which brutalizes and sacrifices the "other." By rejecting the Symbolic, "[t]hose who are melancholic," like Marianne, "refuse roles as initiates of language" because (Reineke 92), as Sherri Hallgren reminds us, "the realm of the spoken . . . [is] the patriarchal, male world" (212). At fifteen, Marianne had realized that "I could erase myself completely by remaining silent" (113-14), and on the day she learns the truth about her husband, she does so, retiring to her room and speaking only to Rebecca, a fellow victim of violence. As Reineke tells us, "Violence . . . does not always present itself in terms of physical assault. Violence transpires also as paralysis, an 'immobilization in being,' as Luce Irigaray observes . . . which can keep a woman locked in her home for years, unable to assert herself" (2). Marianne's large bulk paralyses her, and "the ghosts of small furry animals" that bloat her also stifle her voice (211). She takes Irigaray's theory of violent paralysis to its extreme, locking herself not only in her home, but so deeply within her own body, in a near-catatonic state, that little can reach her.

For Marianne, death offers the only escape from abjection, and she willingly embraces it, returning home when she knows that the rebels are about to blow up the house in an attempt to kill Berence. In this violent death, she hopes to finally find peace: "at last, at long, long last, I no longer expect the sorrow of waking up in the morning" (211). She is not seeking a better world in death, but simply hopes to be freed from her

suffering. Although Marianne assumes Berence will die with her, she dies alone since on this afternoon he skips his customary nap to assist the police in their investigation of the suspected terrorists. Marianne knows about the terrorists and their plans, but does not turn them in or try to protect Berence from them, perhaps because she believes that their cause is just. She does, however, ensure that her daughter will not be harmed.

Driven to seek revenge for the violence which Berence committed in Argentina, the terrorists have pursued him to Quebec. In theory, western justice satisfies the need for revenge with a "single act of reprisal," an act of "*public* vengeance" (Girard 15; emphasis in text); in this situation however, since the Argentine judicial system is implicated in the tortures, the victims must rely on "*private* vengeance." Juan explains that he and Tulio "'want to find the man'" who committed the horrifying acts against them and their families and "'see that he is punished'" (68). Juan's body bears the marks of legally sanctioned torture: he has a scar "snaking up his arm, a zigzag line, purple and welted. . . . it was not a vein; the segments were too perfect, broken fastidiously at equal angles" (68). To Ana, Tulio looks like a "monster in a horror movie" when he is swimming in the sea (12). Because of physical and psychological scarring, these men and others like them are indeed monsters. Monsters created by Berence and his associates. Monsters who, like Frankenstein's creation, terrorize their maker: since the legal system offers the rebels no justice, they answer back to their oppressors with the same violence which they themselves have suffered.

Girard warns us of the contagious nature of violence. A soldier, for example, may be contaminated by the violence of his profession and carry it with him from one society to another (42). We see this with Berence, who learns the art of violence in France's war against Algeria, and then imports the techniques to Argentina--yet another form of sickness which the colonizer carries with him to the new world. This violence then spreads to Canada as the terrorists pursue Berence, seeking revenge on him. Because of

its uncontainable nature, violence threatens not only the man responsible for beginning it, but also his innocent family, and a community which has nothing to do with the Argentine situation. Berence brings violence from Algeria to Argentina, and it then follows him to a quiet, coastal town in Quebec, a place which, until now, had been untouched by the "wide and wicked world" (Manguel 23).

Acting as a member of the Quebec police force, Monsieur Clive investigates the terrorists' presence in Percé. Although he is looking for someone with "'Argentinian experience'" (70), Clive does not suspect that the Captain is the terrorists' target, perhaps because he believes that Berence is too refined and civilized a man to be a torturer (19). Berence himself should make the connection, but, with the arrogance of the colonizer, he underestimates the oppressed and so takes no precautions to protect himself or his family: "'These *guerrilleros* can kill, yes, but it's more likely they'll blow off their own heads than pull off a complicated vengeance'" (70). When a Quebec corporal questions if "'our business is to keep a torturer from being killed,'" Monsieur Clive replies, "'No. Our business is to keep the peace'" (82). Clive understands that vengeance must be carried out only by the law; if it is not, private vengeance will destroy the peace and safety of the community.

Vengeance begets further vengeance (Girard 14), but this particular cycle finally ends with Marianne's sacrifice, a common solution for dealing with violence in societies without a legal system (Girard 20-21). Even though the terrorists do not plan to kill Marianne, she is a suitable sacrificial victim, in Girardian terms, since it is unlikely that anyone will seek vengeance for her death (Girard 13). Berence is an old man who no longer has the power or connections he used to enjoy, and Ana is just a child and lacks the resources to pursue the terrorists. Furthermore, like her mother, Ana sympathizes with the rebels: after hearing about the abuse they suffered, she asks Rebecca to teach her Spanish (74), even though three years earlier she "had promised herself that from then

onwards, for the rest of the days of her life, she would never speak Spanish again" (11). As well, Ana's rejection of Berence suggests that she holds him responsible for Marianne's death. Since neither Marianne nor the terrorists are Canadian citizens, it seems unlikely that the Canadian government will pursue the terrorists if they escape the country: as young Matthieu tells Ana, although the Berences have been in Canada for three years, they "'don't belong here'" (58).

Because Ana is saved from further violence when her mother dies, Marianne's death takes on sacrificial significance. Before the explosion, the violence surrounding Berence puts Ana at a risk of sharing her mother's fate: as a young girl, she sometimes imitates her mother, not as an act of ridicule, but out of the fear that she will become like her one day (9). Marianne's death compels Berence to tell Ana the truth about his life, and he allows her to decide if she will continue to live in his world of violence or leave it. Ana voices an opinion that her mother was incapable of by rejecting Antoine completely. Now that she is away from him, her world will no longer be threatened by men like Monsieur Clive and the Argentine terrorists.

Ana's rejection of her father reminds us that in this novel violence belongs to the male domain. One woman's lament speaks for many:

> "What I don't understand is how it can be done. How you can actually hold a live human being in your hands and . . . deliberately choose an instrument to cut it, to bruise it, to burn it, to deliberately set your mind to think of methods that will harm it, guide your thoughts into the flesh. I mean, if you have held another person, another extraordinary hand with its beautiful fingers, or a head, if you have ever held a head against your shoulder . . . how can you then deliberately cause it to bleed? How can you hurt it? How?" (204)

She questions torture from the perspective of maternal love, an emotion which Kristeva believes provides us with a fitting model for loving the other ("Women's Time" 31), for fashioning a society based on love and acceptance rather than pain, suffering, and sacrifice. The Argentine women meet to protest their losses, offering each other moral support and practical guidance: one of Marianne's prize photos is of a "sea of white-kerchiefed heads, women asking the government for their missing children" (188).

Surely an accepting, harmonious, maternal approach to the "other" is preferable to the violent attempts at purification seen throughout this novel. Violence is often justified as the path to "purity," as the means of destroying a contaminating presence which a maternally-loving world would strive to embrace. Dr. Bencherif, for example, is considered a "'purifier,' a 'restorer of the flesh,'" because he "tear[s] out of Algerian women the bastard children of French soldiers." His daughter explains that such a child "'would have had no name among us. . . . It would have been a ghost. No name, no blood, no shadow. It would not have been French, it would not have been Arab'" (99). As a child, Marianne has a vision of the group of Algerian boys who burn their thirteen-year-old French friend to death in a symbolic protest against the occupation of Algeria, killing him as revenge for the many Arabs murdered by the French (91). After burning the caterpillars devouring a tree, Clive considers the tree "purified" (17). Fire is a common method of purification, and perhaps the terrorists choose to kill Berence with an explosion because they need more than just vengeance, but also want to purify that which has been tainted by his evil. Perhaps too, fire counteracts drowning, one of the Captain's favorite methods of execution. For Marianne, who had long ago decided that the only way to rid herself of the guilt she feels for loving a monster like Berence "was to turn to fire, to consumption and ashes" (210), the explosion is fitting: "explosives. *Fire to fire*, I thought" (211).

Marianne realizes that the protests of women against the violence of men fall on deaf ears, and, understanding that she is powerless to prevent the terrors which her husband creates, she destroys herself, paying for his sins with her life. Her death benefits Ana, however, by freeing her from the nightmarish world of her father: as Antoine tells his story, Ana is at "the bottom of the sea. She was among the drowned. Phosphorous faces watched her from the dashboard" (235). This scene resembles the illustration, *Terrible Fate of the Flying Fish*, which terrified her as a child (10), and whose image has always haunted her; when she leaves the car she is finally free of it. Marianne's sacrifice enables Ana to escape the violence permeating Berence's world so that it cannot destroy her as it did her mother.

This is not a "happily ever after ending," however, since Ana is a cold, wet ten-year-old stranded by the side of the highway in the night rain (235), with nowhere to go and no one to turn to for help (although at least in Canada she will not be left to starve in the streets as she might have been in Argentina). Berence goes free, and is still a threat, but unlike Grace in *Alias Grace*, he has no positive potential since he enforces the oppressive social structure rather than challenging it. He will continue to be--to borrow a description from Monsieur Clive--"'a blind old walrus . . . crushing everything in [his] way'" (72). His final words to Ana reveal that he has not changed: "my question to you, my Ana, is, . . . understanding who I am and what I want, will you, my daughter, come with me? . . . 'Answer me'" (235). Berence does not let Ana go out of love, or he would leave her in a safer place, but deserts her because she is not loyal to him. The Captain continues to value blind obedience to authority above all else, and has not learned to love completely as Marianne did.

Conclusion

Julia Kristeva tells us that we often demonize others, projecting our negative qualities onto those we believe are different in the hope of eliminating these traits from our own psyches. The social contract which structures western society promotes the sacrifice--either physically, or through oppression--of this "other" we have created. The only way to eliminate the sacrificial social contract, with its inherent violence, Kristeva believes, is to learn to accept the other, the strange, the foreign within our unconscious instead of projecting it outside ourselves. If we can do this, we should be able to accept those who differ from us instead of oppressing or destroying them.

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, and Alberto Manguel's *News from a Foreign Country Came* illuminate Kristeva's theories on sacrifice and the "other." Kristeva helps us understand why Grace, as a low-class Irish serving girl in *Alias Grace*, is treated unjustly by society. Grace's class, race, and gender prevent her from receiving a fair trial when she is accused of murder, and the media's demonic portrayal of her eradicates any public sympathy she may have received. Like the historical Grace Marks, Atwood's fictional Grace is eventually released from prison and allowed to return to society. She retains her threatening potential, however, since she has not been truly reformed by her experiences in prison and the insane asylum. Grace's unconfined abject presence provides hope for the possibility of a reformed society capable of accepting the "other."

The exploited "other" in *Green Grass, Running Water* is the Native. The culture of a Blackfoot tribe is threatened by a dam which the government chooses to build on their land despite geological concerns. Eli Stands Alone takes the owners of the dam to court and wins a temporary injunction which prevents it from operating. This is only a delay, however, and the court hesitates to rule decisively against the government even

though it is violating its treaty agreement with the Natives. When it becomes obvious that justice will not be obtained through the legal system, Native gods step in and cause the dam to burst, symbolically washing away an important symbol of white oppression. When Eli drowns in the resulting flood, his community does not regard his death as meaningless, but instead bestows sacrificial significance upon it by gathering together and rebuilding on the spot where he died. This gesture would seem to indicate that Eli's people believe his death has granted them a fresh beginning.

In *News from a Foreign Country Came*, the despised "other" is constructed not on the basis of class, race, or gender, but rather on that of politics. Manguel delves into a world where a government desperate to control its political opponents resorts to the most extreme practices of oppression--torture and execution. While demonstrating the methods and explaining the psychology of torture, the master torturer, Monsieur Berence, teaches his pupils how to dehumanize their victims so as to free them of any guilt which they might otherwise have suffered over their terrible actions. Using Kristeva, Martha J. Reineke helps us understand the purpose of torture, explaining that these "incursions into soma" serve as a means of physically reenacting the subject's psychological inscription into the realm of the Father (Reineke 152). In times of turmoil, when it perceives itself to be "[u]nder threat, a . . . subject is able to take a position in the world and secure its boundaries against radical loss when it viscerally extracts itself from a material matrix" (Reineke 152), reenacting its initial entrance into society (which belongs to the realm of the Symbolic) which required it to violently extract itself from the engulfing body of the Mother. When the torturer reproduces this process by "crossing into and out of" soma (Reineke 90), he may be doing so not only for his own benefit, but also because he intends to reestablish the boundaries and regulations which will restore order to society: "Indeed," according to Reineke,

> Kristeva detects a common pattern in responses that individuals and communities make to potentially lethal threats. Just as a subject under siege may deploy defensive strategies modeled on the initial bounding-practices of emergent subjectivity, so also may a community under threat engage in boundary-building ventures based on those that first brought it into existence as a social order. (68)

Scars left by torture, like the one Juan reveals to Ana, can be read as physical inscriptions of the Symbolic order on the body of the victim. Berence's wife, who can find no other way to cleanse herself of the violence contaminating her husband, sacrifices her life in an explosion that she knows Argentine rebels have set as revenge for the tortures which Berence conducted in their country. Marianne's tragic final act leads her daughter to reject Berence, freeing Ana from the violence which she herself could only escape in death.

If we do as Kristeva hopes and learn to accept others instead of dominating them, we could do away with such violence and oppression, and blood sacrifice would no longer be necessary as an antidote to it. Kristeva believes that literature has the potential to guide us towards this reformed society, and each of these novels contributes to this process by helping the reader understand and embrace the "other." In *Alias Grace*, Atwood offers a possible version of the life of Grace Marks--true in spirit, perhaps, if not in fact--a woman who could not tell her own story because she was silenced by her society. Atwood allows us to see Grace as a person striking out against a system which oppressed and often destroyed women and members of the lower-class, instead of as the demon which she was taken to be by the media of her time. Thomas King tells *Green Grass* mainly from a Native perspective, and using the oral/cyclical structure of traditional Native tales. These techniques immerse the white reader in a Native environment, allowing him/her to experience this world and relate to the Natives, to

realize that although there are cultural differences between our societies, the Native is not the demonic heathen or the romanticized solitary creature of nature which he has traditionally been portrayed as. Such an understanding will hopefully allow white society to deal with People of the First Nations more fairly than we have done in the past. By revealing the horrors which Monsieur Berence commits against political prisoners in *News*, Manguel warns us of the atrocities which people are capable of when they do not regard others as fellow human beings. To prevent such horrors from occurring, we must learn to embrace the "other," for if we identify with them as humans, and relate to their suffering, we will be less likely to intentionally cause them pain.

This will not be an easy process, however, since it requires that we take ownership of the traits we have been projecting onto the "other," no matter how negative they may be. We must come to terms with the fact that each of us, as Kristeva explains, has the "potentialities of *victim/executioner*" ("Women's Time" 34). Like Berence, for example, we all have a desire for order and a sense of duty which could, if left unquestioned, lead us to act as he does. By accepting our own negativity, multiplicities, and "bizarrenesses," we will "tend less to constitute enemies" of the stranger (Kristeva, "Cultural Strangeness" 41), and so will be more likely to contain our potential for destruction.

Kristeva's theories offer the reader greater insight into these three novels, while the novels guide us to accept the "other" and condemn violence committed against them. Such an attitude encourages us to reject the sacrificial social contract of our society with its inherent violence, and to replace it with Kristeva's ideal, a harmonious society with a social contract based on acceptance and understanding of the other/stranger/foreigner--both outside ourselves and within our unconscious.

Notes

Chapter 1 (pp. 1-15)

[1] Allison Weir defines "the thetic" as the "interaction and engagement of the practice of the subject with the structure of language . . . . This corresponds to the subjective process of the development of self-identity: of the identification of the self as a self through the recognition of separateness from objects/others, and one's own image" (158).

[2] See, for example, Alan Lawson, "Postcolonial Theory and the 'Settler' Subject," and Rayna Green, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe."

[3] See Jonathan Bordo, "Jack Pine--Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Landscape." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27.4 (1992-93): 98-128, and Scott Watson, "Race, Wilderness, Territory and the Origins of Modern Canadian Landscape Painting." *semiotext(e): canadas* V1.2 (1994): 93-104.

[4] Analyzing existing scholarship on the witch hunts, Reineke explains that "Christina Larner cites a changed legal system as an essential precondition of the witch craze," while, "[a]ccording to Erik Midelfort, preconditions for the witch craze in southwestern Germany . . . were founded similarly in a new legal possibility: the inquisitorial trial" (Reineke 132).

[5] The idea about communication comes from Garry Watson, who points out that victims of similar crises in *The Secret Agent* and *Billy Budd, Sailor* suffer from speech impediments which make it difficult for them to communicate (16).

Chapter 2 (pp. 16-36)

[1] Although LeSueur dismisses these allegations quite lightly, explaining that they were exceptions and not the general case, the fact that such incidents occurred at all reveals the potential for widespread abuse.

[2] In mid-nineteenth-century Canada, the principles of democracy and equality were just beginning to take hold, but still had far to go: no Canadian woman was permitted to vote until 1916, for example, and Quebec women were not enfranchised until 1940.

[3] Reineke's explanation of the mimetic crisis is an analysis of Kristeva's theory in "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident."

[4] Abjection poses a grave threat to the social order so society needs to "cure" it. Kristeva, on the other hand, sees abjection as a space which allows for the possibility of change, not as something which should be cured--and certainly not as something which could be cured by forcing it to conform to the very rules which caused it to exist in the first place.

[5] Emile Durkheim explains that "the pure and the impure [or evil] are not two separate classes, but two varieties of the same class, which" belong to the sacred (458).

Chapter 3 (pp. 37-58)

[1] In "To Know the Difference: Mimicry, Satire and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*," Dee Horne analyzes King's portrayal of the inherent conflict between traditional Native culture and the patriarchy, rules, and hierarchy of Christianity (261-62).

[2] *Green Grass* is rich in intertextual references, and, as Laura Donaldson points out, "not wanted on the voyage" is the title of a Timothy Findley novel in which women "contest the dominance of Noah as well as the masculinist, hierarchical, and genocidal 'rules' that he enacts" (36).

[3] Lacan tells us that "[t]he symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing" (qtd. in Reineke 65).

[4] Allen thinks that it was because settler society saw the matriarchal structure of the traditional Native lifestyle as such a threat that they tried to wipe out the Natives

completely: "The physical and cultural genocide of American Indian tribes is and was mostly about patriarchal fear of gynocracy. . . . [The colonizers] could not tolerate peoples who allowed women to occupy prominent positions and decision-making capacity at every level of society" (3). While I am not sure if this was indeed most of the reason for the genocidal impulse, I agree that it may have been an important factor.

5 The province of Alberta, for example, has "'a history of developers getting permission to operate on Crown land and then ignoring what the natives consider to be their traditional lands'" according to Richard Secord, a lawyer representing Native interests against the Crown (qtd. in Russell).

6 The case of Leonard Peltier, as he describes it on Robbie Robertson's CD, shows us that like Lionel, real Natives are often victimized by the legal system. Peltier, who points out that the "United States penitentiary . . . is the swiftest growing Indian reservation" in America, has been imprisoned since 1976 for an incident involving the American Indian Movement in which "two agents were killed, [and] one Indian was murdered." Two other men who were also charged were freed on the grounds of self-defense, but Peltier "was found guilty before a jury of non-Indian people." Despite the prosecution's admission that it was unsure of Peltier's role in the shootings, it insisted on his guilt because "someone has to pay for the crime." Leonard Peltier remains in prison today, offering himself up as a sacrifice for his people: "someone has to pay the sacrifice to make things better for our people . . . I don't give up, not until my people are free will I give up. And if I have to sacrifice some more then I sacrifice some more." Leonard presents the possibility that, as a final resort, self-sacrifice can be used to combat the sacrifice exacted by the authorities.

7 Furthermore, as Canadians, we are bombarded with media coverage on disputes between Natives and the government--often over land claims which have been dragging out for years--which, more and more often, seem to escalate into full-fledged

violence. We bring an awareness of incidents such as the ones at Oka and Gustafsen Lake to the text, giving King's humourous novel ominous undertones. Knowledge of real-life situations similar to the one *Green Grass* may cause the reader to consider the possibility that violence could break out in the novel as the Natives grow increasingly frustrated by the legal system's failure to produce results and the government's refusal to respond to Band concerns.

[8] To provide just one example, "an RCMP tactical-team sniper was given permission to shoot to kill an Indian demonstrator" at the Gustafsen Lake standoff. Despite the fact that the man "was in an agreed-upon safe area . . . [t]he sniper fired three bullets. Fortunately, he missed" (Pugliese 43).

[9] While the inscription is aesthetically effective, it is also problematic since King's characters are members of the Blackfoot tribe, not the Cherokee. Although many tribes now refer to themselves as People of the First Nations, each still wants to maintain a distinctive identity and does not want bits and pieces of different cultures brought together as the settlers used to do, creating a hybrid Indian representing all, but none accurately.

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